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# Do Spoken Languages Distinguish Middle Class Milieus?

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October 2020

# **Do Spoken Languages Distinguish Middle Class Milieus?**

**A Case Study on Accounts of Language Choices within two Social  
Milieus in Nairobi**



*Photo by Helena Funk, 2019*

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## **List of Abbreviations**

AFDB	African Development Bank
KPHC	Kenyan Population and Housing Census
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NSE	Nairobi Securities Exchange
RDS	Respondent driven sampling
UN	United Nation
UNEP	United Nation Environmental Program
USIU	Unites States International University Africa

## **1. Introduction: Language Research Meets Sociology**

The African continent is well known for its diversity and co-existence of numerous ethnicities and languages. Kenya has one of the fastest growing economies in Africa and is home to 53 million people. Around 27% of them live in urban areas (worldometer 2020, online). Additionally, Nairobi, the capital of Kenya, is one of the largest and fastest growing cities within Africa. As a city with worldwide relevance, it is home to UN-Habitat and UNEP, as well as many headquarters of international NGOs and businesses. In addition, the profile of the city is changing. While previously people came to Nairobi for work and then returned home to their rural areas (Parkin 1974a: 131), today there is also a new generation that grew up in Kenya's capital city. These facts make Nairobi not only an attractive place to live but also a hotspot for research on various aspects of life.

A large amount of research has been conducted in numerous fields such as politics, society, and the change of lifestyle (cf. Charton-Bigot and Rodriguez-Torres 2010). One of the particularly interesting areas is sociology as it focuses on how people live together and build societies. Sociology research in recent years has focused on the emerging middle class in Kenya. Following the class approach by the African Development Bank (2011), Melber (2015), Lentz (2016), and Ncube et al. (2015) among others looked in detail at the middle and floating classes<sup>1</sup>. In addition, various research projects have been started focusing on the biographies and lifestyles of middle class people specifically in Nairobi (Weindenhaus and Mock within the Berlin project SFB 1265 Re-Figuration of Space – Biographies of Middle Classes, Spronk 2012, Kroeker et al. 2018). Since 2013, a project of the Bayreuth Academy of Advanced African Studies has been researching rising middle class(es) in Africa with the aim to improve this often recited but insufficient class-analysis approach (cf. Neubert and Stoll 2015). Neubert and Stoll (2015) collected empirical data to develop a social milieu<sup>2</sup> study for the societies in the Global South, namely Kenya. They argue that due to sociocultural differences within the population there is also a horizontal distinction that becomes visible through the existence of milieus. Therefore, Neubert and Stoll established different parameters<sup>3</sup> to characterize and

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<sup>1</sup> Floating classes are defined as the lower middle class. This category includes people who are very vulnerable and can easily fall back into the lower classes (cf. AfDB 2011).

<sup>2</sup> A social milieu is a sociological description that groups people together with a similar way of living and shared norms and perspectives. In contrast to class analysis it is not singular based on economic factors but also include socio-cultural ones.

<sup>3</sup> The parameters for identifying social milieus include social positioning, values, everyday practices, aspirations, orientations, norms, ways of life, and ideals. Among these parameters, language use is also mentioned but has not yet been analyzed in-depth (cf. Spronk 2012; Neubert 2019; Neubert and Stoll 2015: 9; Flaig et al. 1993: 71; Appendix A).

differentiate Kenya's middle class milieus (Neubert and Stoll 2015: 9). Based on these characteristics, Neubert and Stoll have identified at least six<sup>4</sup> social milieus<sup>5</sup> in urban Kenya. While Neubert and Stoll name languages as one of the distinction markers between certain of these social milieus, no further research has been conducted on the empirical significance of language use. Thus, the empirical significance of language choices among people of middle class milieus is a gap in the field of African Studies when it comes to the interface of sociological research and studies on self-accounts of language choices within urban Kenya. This gap can be condensed to the question of this Master's thesis: Do spoken languages distinguish middle class milieus in urban Kenya?

### *Aims of the Master's Thesis and Research Design*

This thesis aims to combine these two strains of research: Sociological research on social milieus and research on self-accounts of languages. Thus far, there is only a little research on accounts of language choices and the expression of attitudes in multilingual settings. In order to fill this research gap, my study combines language analysis with the milieu approach. By looking at self-accounts of language use, I will test existing pre-assumptions about middle class milieus. For the analysis, I focus on two milieus that capture the same age-group but differ in terms of socioeconomic position, origin, and lifestyles: Young Professionals and Social Climbers (cf. Spronk 2012; Stoll 2016; Stoll 2017a; Stoll 2018b; Neubert 2019). The data was collected during a three-month stay in Nairobi in 2019. They include observations and field-notes collected over sixty semi-structured<sup>6</sup> recorded interviews and literature research.

Language indicating an important parameter for belonging and identity is not a new phenomenon, but has long been part of cultural analysis (cf. Malinowski (1979 [1922]); Goffman 1974; Goffman 1981). In the past, linguistic schools have mostly focused on formal systems of phonology, grammar, lexis, and ways these encode meaning. The aim of this linguistic research was to define clear boundaries and provide a detailed description of how languages function. The analysis was thereby often shaped by Western ways of thinking and monolingual categories (Barasa and Smakman 2016). The way languages were understood and described by missionaries, colonialists, and linguists (cf. Errington 2001; Errington 2008)—

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<sup>4</sup> The identified social milieus are: Christian Religious, Stability-Oriented Pragmatics, Cosmopolitan Liberals, Neo-Traditionals, Social Climbers, Young Professionals (Stoll 2018b; Neubert and Stoll 2018; Stoll 2017a).

<sup>5</sup> They state that there are additional milieus such as the Hindu and Muslim Milieus that contain a smaller share of the population. They have not yet been sufficiently researched (Neubert and Stoll 2015: 8).

<sup>6</sup> After coding and developing different ideal types, I concentrated on thirteen interviews out of the total number of conducted interviews.

embedded in colonial and Western structures—set the tone for how languages were regarded in the African and Asian contexts. In contrast, more recent research on languages within multilingual contexts (e.g., cf. Blommaert and Rampton 2011; Otsuij and Peenycook 2010; Anchimbe 2007; Gafaranga 2016) focuses on deconstructing languages and argues against fixed and static categorizations of languages. Through a detailed look at the entanglement of languages, the lines between them become visible and increasingly blurry. As previously stated, newer research in multilingual settings distances itself from ‘standard languages’<sup>7</sup> and languages as closed categories (e.g. cf. Blommaert and Rampton 2011; Otsuij and Peenycook 2010).

In my work, however, I still refer to languages as categories that are differentiable from one another as this corresponds with the way my interviewees use the terms to describe languages such as Sheng, Swahili<sup>8</sup>, and English. Consequently, I regard ‘standard’ versions of languages as commonly agreed units and aim to analyze the meaning different languages have for their speakers. My interviewees used these names of language for describing these languages and for identification. By distancing themselves from particular languages and emphasizing another language, belonging can be expressed and identities constructed. Thus, my work does not analyze the linguistic parameters of the language entanglement. Rather, I aim to test the middle-class milieu through the self-accounts of language use and the resulting pictures of identities. However, code-switching and mixing<sup>9</sup>—as stated in the self-observation—are taken into consideration. Furthermore, this study works with self-accounts of language choices in contrast to a linguistic ethnography study that would focus on how languages are mixed and entangled. Although the actual language used by the groups analyzed might be different in reality, this study provides insight into self-portraits and takes additional social aspects of the milieu characteristics into consideration such as situational behavior and the environment. While belonging to a specific milieu is often characterized by shared norms, orientations or future expectations, the analysis of language adds a ‘doing’ aspect to the milieu approach. Thus, belonging is constantly re-produced in every single interaction as well and the self-descriptions of these interactions thereby reflects, shapes, or contradicts other elements which are characteristic for a specific milieu.

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<sup>7</sup> Barasa and Smakam define standard languages as “a linguistic norm which a very large speech community overly adheres to” (Barasa and Smakam 2016: 23). Furthermore, they develop the Haugen’s language standardization definition from monolingual societies (Haugen 1966) and argue that also code-switching can be a norm and thus, seen as a standard.

<sup>8</sup> In the following, I will refer to Kiswahili as Swahili as there are many different variations of Swahili (some would call this phenomena Viswahili to give it the plural version).

<sup>9</sup> A definition of code-switching and mixing is given in chapter 3.4.



### *Theoretical Impact*

Besides combining the two mentioned research strains of sociology and language research, this research adds new insights from empirical data on language usage to the existing ones about social milieus. Furthermore, this thesis also intervenes on a theoretical level. While the social milieu approach is located on the mesolevel (cf. Stoll 2016), analyzing self-accounts of language choices is located on an interactional microlevel.<sup>10</sup> By combining these two, the micro case study on self-accounts of language usage challenges the sociological mesostudy on social milieus, in a theoretical manner. Hereby, the categories of sociology as well as those of language are put into question. While milieus are rather fixed categories based on lifestyles, in contrast, languages and language choices seem to follow another logic that does not necessarily overlap with the static categories of the milieu approach. The microlevel analysis of self-accounts of language choice provides a detailed study that can also break up the categorial meso- or even macroconstructions of milieus. By combining the milieu approach on the mesolevel and the language research on the microlevel, I aim to mutually enrich the two disciplines. Additionally, tensions will be outlined that have not yet been captured on social milieus in Nairobi. The cases of the two social milieus, namely the Young Professionals and the Social Climbers, will function as examples to illuminate differences within a single milieu and test existing pre-assumptions about language usage concerning these milieus (esp. by Neubert and Stoll (2015; 2018), as well as Spronk (2012) for Young Professionals).

### *Structure of the Thesis*

This thesis is structured in six main parts. In the chapter after this introduction (1), I introduce my field site, namely the city Nairobi. I give a brief summary of its history and its language-scape as well as its demographic situation (2). The following chapter (3) will focus on theory and draws a line from the inter- disciplinary discussions about stratification and group construction from class to *Schicht*<sup>11</sup> to social milieus. It provides insights into the sociological debates and inter- disciplinary challenges. Next, I argue that language research enriches the social milieu research—especially in multilingual communities such as Nairobi. Furthermore, a brief outline of language research is provided in this section. In the following chapter (4), I

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<sup>10</sup> Here I follow the distinction by sociologists, who differentiate between micro-, meso and marco-levels. While macro-level is a rather global view on something, the micro-level analyzes individual behaviors. The mesolevel is located in between these two, such as social milieus. The mesolevel can also be the accumulation of individual behaviors in contrast to another group.

<sup>11</sup> *Schicht* is a sociological approach to explain vertical differentiation within a population. For more information see chapter 3.1 and Geissler (2014).

explain my methods focusing on my field trip to Nairobi from June to September 2019. Here, also a reflection of my role within the field as well as challenges I faced, can be found. In addition, this chapter also includes my study design covering my sample, observations, and interviews. Furthermore, the coding process and data analysis are part of this chapter. In the fifth chapter (5), I present my findings. The first part of this chapter focuses on Young Professionals whereas the second part highlights the case study of Social Climbers. Based on these two case studies, I argue in the third part how language choice and belonging to a specific milieu are entangled and mutually re-produce each other. Finally, in the last chapter (6) I sum up my results and give an outlook on possible follow-up studies.

## **2. Introducing Nairobi**

### **2.1 Nairobi—Settlers Town or Metropolis?**

#### *The Colonial Heritage of Nairobi*

Nairobi is located in southern central Kenya and marks the halfway point of the railway between Mombasa and Kampala (Médard 2010: 25). It did not exist before the colonial era, but was founded around the year 1899 and planned as a “European city in a European country in Africa” (Mbembe 2004: 375–376).<sup>12</sup> As it was expected to be a small acculturation of houses primarily for white settlers, specific areas at the outskirts were assigned for so-called Kenyans and others for Asian people (Myers 2003; Médard 2010). Apart from Kenyan people, many Arabs and Indians as well as Europeans settled here (Lonsdale 2010: 4). During the early years, men, in particular, were more numerous in Nairobi than women; men came to work in the town while their families stayed in the rural areas (Parkin 1974a: 131). The city planning with elements of segregation continued even after independence—as seen in the city plan Metro 2030 (Myers 2014; Government of the Republic of Kenya 2008). Effects of racial segregation can still be seen today (Murunga 2012: 464; Greven 2014: 229). The segregation is noticeable between classes, and ethnic belonging also played a significant role for many years. To this day, quarters are dominated by specific ethnic groups and thus partly to specific vernacular languages (Bryceson 2006: 30). For instance, Bahati has a high percentage of Kikuyu people (Thomanek 1996: 118; Parkin 1974b: 148), whereas other quarters are home to primarily Asian migrants (cf. Médard 2010; Murunga 2012; Myers 2003). Today, even small ‘China towns’ can be found close to Kilimani.

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<sup>12</sup> Examples such as Mombasa, that has been a harbor city for centuries, show that there are also older cities that were not the product of colonial politics (Lonsdale 2010).

People speak of ‘crossing the line’ when they are referring to moving from neighborhoods such as Eastlands to Kilimani, Eastlands to Westlands, and Eastlands to Kileleshwa. The estates in the western parts of the city are considered to be the ones for the emerging middle and upper class, and they have a high percentage of international expats (Bryceson 2006: 14; Murunga 2012: 464; Greven 2014: 229).

### *The Rise of Nairobi*

When Nairobi was founded in 1899, Kenya was under British governance. In fact, it had been under British rule since the Berlin conference in 1884. This is why the British school system and administration was established there. During the 1930s, the railway company increased the number of well-educated Kenyans that they employed (Lonsdale 2010: 16). In 1901, Nairobi was made the headquarters for government administration because businesses with local, national, and global impacts were located there (e.g. UN Habitat, UNEP) (Myers 2003: 34). A rising number of international NGOs and companies have settled here and made the city an international hub and megacity of global importance. Among these worldwide operating institutions, the UN campus was established in Nairobi in 1996.

When Kenyans gained their independence in 1964, some politicians and administrators were replaced at their workplaces. However, the system with its structures established by the colonialists remained for a long time and is still shaped by the colonial era.

At the end of the colonial era in 1969 Nairobi was considered a rather small town. It had 500,000 inhabitants, where 82% were regarded as African, 14% Asian, and four percent European (Parkin 1974a: 131). But even in the early years, life in Nairobi was defined by transethnic interactions as well as cosmopolitan flair and culture. Additionally, the city was characterized by people of different religions living together including Muslims, Hindus, and Christians (Lonsdale 2010: 13). However, it is noteworthy that in the late 1960s only three percent of the people living in Nairobi were born there (Lonsdale 2010: 9). This means that there was still a significant migration toward the city and similarly a great exodus for elders moving back to rural areas after earning enough money. For many, Nairobi remained a “place to earn an income, but not a home” until the 1980s (Scotton 1982: 123).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> While most people living in Nairobi worked for the colonial administration, filling essential roles such as porters and soldiers, others worked for the railway (Lonsdale 2010: 13).

### *Nairobi today*

Today, Nairobi is the fourteenth largest city by population in Africa and commonly known as ‘the Green City in the Sun’ (UN Habitat 2020, online). The international vibe in the city is visible, for instance, in the large expat community. In addition, the worldwide connections can be seen in its trading volume and economic growth, which is close to 50% a year (UN Habitat 2020, online). In fact, the Nairobi Securities Exchange (NSE) “is one of the largest in Africa and the second oldest exchange on the continent” (UN Habitat 2020, online). The economic growth and expected wealth in the city attract many international and national workers, although not everyone gets a share of this wealth. The gap between wealthy and poorer people that live in informal settlements is immense. This economic deviation contains many challenges for the city and its population. Nevertheless, over the last few decades, Nairobi has become increasingly attractive. People from within Kenya, from its neighboring countries, and from the rest of the world move to Nairobi seeking work and a better way of living.

In 1999, the city counted over 2 million inhabitants. It counted over 3.5 million in the year 2016. This makes Nairobi one of the fastest growing cities and the second largest city in the Great Lakes Area (World Population Review 2016). Today, around 4.39 million people live within the capital city of Kenya (KPHC-1 2019: 7). Around thirty-five percent of the population is between 10–24 years old—which makes it to a city with a high percentage of young people (Odenge 2014). Despite the over 40<sup>14</sup> ethnic groups from Kenya, Nairobi is also home and workplace to numerous professionals from all over the world, and so to people from very different socioeconomic backgrounds (Barasa 2015: 40; Wa Njogu 2004: 56).

In the years around independence, people often moved to Nairobi for work and then went back to their rural homes for retirement (De Lame 2010: 153; Scotton 1982: 123; Bryceson 2006: 20), but this has changed rapidly in the last decades. Today you will find a generation that was born and grew up in the city and consider themselves Nairobians, which they express in their lifestyle, their way of dressing, and in their behavior (Mwaniki 2014).

Furthermore, the urban space in Nairobi is considered to be a safer space and is known for abiding more freedom. The city is therefore also a space for interethnic marriages as well as the emergence of subcultures and new lifestyle trends. In conclusion, Nairobi is a vibrant city that is a melting pot of cultures and traditions. It is strongly internationally connected and has a high significance for Africa and the world.

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<sup>14</sup> Each ethnic group has its own vernacular language. Other sources state that there are even over 68 different languages in Kenya (Greven 2014: 228; Githiora 2018: 39).

## 2.2 Language-Scape and Language Policy in Kenya

### *Kenya's Language Policy During Colonial Times*

Kenya, which was established as a country by the British colonialists in 1884, was characterized by a great variety of ethnicities and languages. While in the coastal area the spoken language Swahili was influenced by Arabs and trading to Asian countries, the mainland was home to over 40 different ethnic groups—each with their own language (Barasa 2015: 40; Wa’Njogu 2004: 56).<sup>15</sup> Swahili, however, was considered a language of a “mercantile society” (Middelton 1994).

The British colonialists implemented English as the official language and it was widely used in administrations as well as in schools. Additionally, the colonialists started media communication in Kenya such as the first newspaper that was printed in English (Wa’Njogu 2004: 57). English became compulsory for final exams in school in 1953, and since 1962 it has been the only language of instruction in some schools in the Nairobi school system (Bing 2018: 61). In contrast, Swahili was not a compulsory examination subject in school until 1985 (Wa’Njogu 2004: 70).

### *Language Policy in Kenya after Independency*

After Kenya became independent from Britain in 1964, English remained the official language. Around that time, only 7.3% of the population living in Nairobi had English as their mother tongue; however, it was the main language of administration and bureaucracy (Liberse and McCabe 1982: 85-86). Even though a survey showed that most Kenyans would prefer Swahili as a national language, this desire was ignored after independence. Instead, the language policy of the colonial rulers continued—almost without any adjustments (Bing 2018: 61). English therefore remained a prestigious and important language (Lieberse and McCabe 1982: 86). However, after president Jomo Kenyatta gave a moving speech in 1969, the popularity of the Swahili language increased immensely. Thereafter, Swahili grew in its importance as a language within Kenya and became a national language (Wa’Njogu 2004: 70). It took until the year 1974 for Swahili to become the second official and national language as well as the language of parliament (Wa’Njogu 2004: 61, 70; Bing 2018: 62; Onyango 2005: 219 -220; Constitution of Kenya 2010: 14).

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<sup>15</sup> The exact number of ethnic groups and languages remains unclear as numbers range from 40 to over 68 – facing the struggle of how to differentiate between a language and a dialect (Githiora 2018: 39). However, the numbers of speakers also differ between a few dozen and several thousands (cf. Bing 2018: 60).

In 2010, Swahili was officially declared equal to English in the country's constitution (Constitution of Kenya 2010: 14); however, theory and practice diverge (Onyango 2005: 223-224). While Swahili and English are legally considered the main languages, vernaculars<sup>16</sup> are still spoken—especially but not only in rural areas (Wa’Njogu 2004: 70; Githiora 2018: 39).

Looking at Nairobi in the years after independence, it is easy to recognize the strong links between ethnic groups; most Kenyans stay within their communities and within their ethnic groups (Parkin 1974a: 141). In contrast, today many interethnic marriages can be observed—especially in the capital city. In post-independent Nairobi, Parkin considers Kikuyu, Luyia, Luo and Kamba to be the main ethnic groups (Parkin 1974a: 132).

### *Today's Language-Scape of Nairobi*

Even today, scholars claim that there is a dominance of English in Kenya—associated with education and privileged people (Bing 2018: 63; Wa’Njogu 2004: 69-70). Muaka emphasizes that for people living in Kenya, it is not unusual to speak the two official languages English and Swahili as well as one or several vernacular languages, especially when living in a multi-ethnic setting (Muaka 2011: 218).

Regarding the education system, children are (officially) taught in their local language up to Standard Four, before the language of instruction changes to English and Swahili—though there is an emphasis on the first one (Githiora 2018b: 42).<sup>17</sup> While students in rural areas might be taught in vernacular languages, many schools in Nairobi begin with English as the language of instruction. Some even start with English in nursery school. This focus on the English roots in the importance of that language for the final exams, and for secondary as well as tertiary education (Muaka 2011: 218).

One hears many languages in Nairobi today. While English and Swahili are still considered to be the most widely spoken ones, also vernaculars and international languages can be heard. Research that analyzes language use in Kenya, often focus on the ‘new’ phenomena of Sheng (e.g. Ferrari 2007; Mose 2013; Wa’Njogu 2004; Greven 2014).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The languages that are specific for ethnic belonging and that are often learned as the first language or mother tongue are named vernaculars in this thesis. Ethnic language, mother tongue and vernacular languages are handled equally, whereas vernaculars has been chosen as a neutral expression.

<sup>17</sup> Githiora stresses that Swahili and English do not necessarily mean the “standard” version but he points at phenomena such as ‘Kenyan Swahili’ and ‘Kenyan English’ (Githiora 2018: 41).

<sup>18</sup> Another important study on language in Kenya was conducted by Whitney and Parkin in the 1960s (Whiteley 1974) It provides information about language usage in relation to different neighborhoods in Nairobi. Although this study is unique in its size and complexity, one has to consider that the study is already quite old.

As language policies are strongly shaped by institutions such as education systems, mass media, and judiciary, organizations such as Twaweza Communication promote Swahili and vernacular languages to ensure they remain their space in society (Twaweza Communication 2020, online). Regarding the media, which was controlled by the government until 1992, today radio is mainly broadcast in English and Swahili. In addition, broadcasting in vernacular languages started recently. To this day, most newspapers are published in English and Swahili (Muaka 2011: 219; Wa’Njogu 2004).

### **3. Conceptualizing: Moving from Macro to Micro**

After this introduction to Nairobi and the language scape, I focus on a different aspect of urban Kenya, which is the change in social structures. While many studies claim Kenya has a rising middle class, I argue in this chapter, why the ‘classic’ term of middle class is not satisfying for the African continent, or more specifically why the term middle class is not sufficient to describe and analyze Nairobi’s middle classes. First, I outline the roots of class and strata and then show their limitations and introduce social milieus as an alternative approach to analyze societies. Zooming in from the macrolevel to the mesolevel of analyzation provides a path to include language research into the study on social milieus in Nairobi. The concept by Neubert and Stoll will be explained and an overview on language research will be provided.

#### **3.1 From Macro to Meso—From Middle Class to Social Milieus**

##### *Sociological Macro Concepts—Class and Schicht*

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century Karl Marx (1818-1883) established class analysis by analyzing European class structures (Groß 2015: 20; Geißler 2014: 93; Marx 1970 [1867]). Marx claimed that society was built upon several classes. In particular, he differentiated between the working class and the bourgeoisie (Neubert 2014: 25; Groß 2015: 40; Marx 1970 [1867]). This distinction is made between those who participate in the production-process and those who own the means of production and capital (Groß 2015: 21). Thus, Marx focused on economic values and aimed to explain social inequalities (Groß 2015: 21).

Later, Max Weber (1864-1920) extended Marx’ class concept by adding a more precise definition of class (cf. Weber 1980[1921]). He did not limit the class term any more to two initial classes. Instead he expanded it (Groß 2015: 24). Thereby, he took socio-cultural differences based on lifestyles (conduct of life—*Lebensführungsart*), identities and particular shared values into consideration (Neubert 2014: 23; Neubert and Stoll 2018: 65-66; Rössel and

Otte 2001). Grounded in these socio-cultural differences, Weber formulated ideal types and linked these to specific class characteristics (Weber 1980[1921]).

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Theodor Geiger (1891-1952) introduced a concept to describe society and its increasing differentiation through strata (*Schichten*) (Groß 2015: 13; Geißler 2014). He suggested that differentiation can be easier displayed as inequality and distinctions pictured in more distinguished way. The strata concept was further developed and different illustrations such as houses and onions (*Zwiebel*) visualize the different social layers (Geißler 2014: 99-101). These layers are mostly defined by employment, capital and education (Groß 2015: 36). However, this implies that Geiger already added additional parameter to Marx' and Weber's concepts as mentalities play a role and show that people have more in common than a similar income (Neubert and Stoll 2018: 66). In his concept, Geiger distances himself from structural exploitation and the aim to explain how inequality was generated. Instead he focuses on the description of the society (Groß 2015: 13; 36).

To conclude, in German sociology class mainly implies an analysis of society, while strata is a more differentiated concept that is rather a description than an explanation of how it emerged (Geißler 2014: 95). While the German sociology differentiates between class and strata, the Anglo Saxonian does mostly speak of 'class' without further differentiations.

For the African continent, the concept of class analysis has been applied several times, however it has barely been adjusted to the context.

#### *Limits of Macro Concepts: What about the African Middle Class?*

As described before, the class concepts aggregate vertical groups with similar structural characteristics such as income, occupation and lifestyle (Stoll 2018b: 280). However, this concept with its origin in Europe does not represent all societies worldwide. As Neubert argues, the sample country Germany, which is the source of class theory, should be seen as an exception rather than the norm (Neubert 2019: 6).

Despite the fact, that especially African societies are not historically class societies and do not share a class-consciousness (Neubert 2019:6), there is still a huge debate about the African Middle class. Based on the publication by the African Development Bank (2011), numerous studies have focused on the emerging African middle classes (cf. Spronk 2012; Melber 2015; Neubert and Stoll 2015; Lentz 2016; Kroeker et al. 2018; Ncube and Lufumpa 2015). The debate on African middle classes can also be contextualized within a global discourse on middle classes (cf. Heiman et al. 2012; Lange and Meier 2009). Often this emerging middle



class is connected to democracy, consumption and economy (Neubert 2014: 23; Neubert and Stoll 2018: 58; Neubert 2019:16), thus it goes along with growth and stability for the own country.

Most of these studies, however, neglect that a homogenous middle class does not exist as both, socio-economic as well as socio-cultural differences urge for a more differentiated way of description (Neubert 2014: 23). Thereby, the understanding of ‘middle class’ is quite vague and differs from “in-betweenness” (Lentz 2016: 43) to “neither-rich-nor-poor” (Darbon 2014: 14; Kroeker et al. 2018: 9) to the self-definition of people (Lentz 2016: 16) and their vulnerability (Neubert 2019: 13).

In regards to the African middle class narrative, the term middle class mostly refers to (1) socio-economic position, (2) socio-cultural entity with similar values and norms, (3) a group of consumers, (4) promoters of democracy (Neubert and Stoll 2018) or (5) "aspirational category"—opportunities for upward mobility (Spronk 2018: 316; Melber 2016: 16; Neubert 2019: 17). Thereby, it relates to a previous academic debate on elites in Africa which took place in the 1960s and 1970s (Lentz 2016).

Although huge differences among the middle classes emerge, the inhomogeneity is barely named and reflected (Neubert 2019: 15). While the African Development Bank (2011) illustrates differences among income and economic power, sociocultural differences remain unnoticed. However, differentiating the middle class in terms of financial power and distinguish floating class from upper middle class, hence to express this diversity by talking about middle classes (in plural) is a first step. Elaborating sociocultural differences is where the research of Neubert and Stoll (2015) commences.

### *Beyond Classes: Social Milieus—A Mesostudy Picturing Heterogeneity*

Critics of the middle class approach claim that sociocultural differences within one class are not sufficiently considered by researchers (cf. Rössel 2005: 23-24). Looking at different classes in a detailed way shows that there is more than one single lifestyle within one class (Neubert und Stoll 2015; Neubert 2019: 20-22). To face this shortcoming of horizontal differentiation within classes, Hradil (1987) and Flaig et al. (1993) among others focused on lifestyles in concepts such as small life-worlds *Kleine Lebenswelten* (Neubert and Stoll 2015) and social milieus. Thereby, people who have similar values, actions and aims in life are grouped together (Stoll 2018b: 280). In this context, social milieus are defined as “a subcultural unit within a society which group together people with a similar view of life and way of life” (Flaig et al.

1993: 55—translated by Neubert in Neubert 2019: 26). Thus, an income and economic focus is not the only dimension for grouping people. Instead a horizontal approach within this vertical structure is a new and promising form of analysis.

Although this concept was established in Europe<sup>19</sup>, it is also one way to understand and describe social structures in Africa. It can be applied to the African context because social milieus do not aim to explain their emergence but to picture the status quo of a society. As Neubert puts it, it uses sociological means “while remaining open for empirical realities” (Neubert 2019: 6). The African context shows—even better than Europe, where the theory originated—how the conventional class approach comes to its limits while explaining society structures. This concept needs to be adjusted and further developed in order to test it in different cultural settings. Worldwide applicability should not be taken for granted without further testing (Neubert 2019: 6-7). In line with Neubert’s argumentation, I acknowledge works like “Provincializing Europe” (Chakrabarty 2000) and “Theories from the South” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012) that criticize Eurocentrism in research and endorse these alternative perspectives and approaches. Nevertheless, I do not aim to develop a new theory, but to widen the empirical perspectives on social structures by remaining open to unexpected results (cf. Neubert 2019: 7). In addition, I adjust theories to their context—for instance, I have added language as a parameter to the social milieu approach for analyzing a multilingual society.

Interestingly, social scientists do not agree about the location of the macro or meso-level of analysis for social milieus: Neubert (2019) among others locates milieus as an analysis of society on the macrolevel. Meanwhile Stoll (2016) argues that milieus cannot be seen globally but are located at a national level. Consequently, he speaks about milieu analysis on a mesolevel (Stoll 2016: 198; Stoll 2018b: 281). He argues further that microstudies are essential to meso-/macro analysis as macro-social structures are repeated and reproduced within social micro-interactions (Stoll 2016: 200, cf. Collins 2004 in Vester 2010: 170). This means that Stoll believes there are global milieus, (as Neubert 2019 argues), but that on a rather local level one can speak about meso social milieus that capture small life-worlds (*kleine Lebenswelten*) and that are more fluid. One can change one’s milieu during the lifetime. A meso milieu captures several small life worlds and clusters them into milieus—within one milieu the small life worlds resemble (Stoll 2016: 199). An example of mapping people by their lifestyles societies with emerging market can be seen in figure 1.

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<sup>19</sup> In Germany the concept of social milieus is strongly shaped by the SINUS-Institute that used this concept for market analysis and STRATA (Stoll 2018b: 281; Sinus Sociovision 2009).

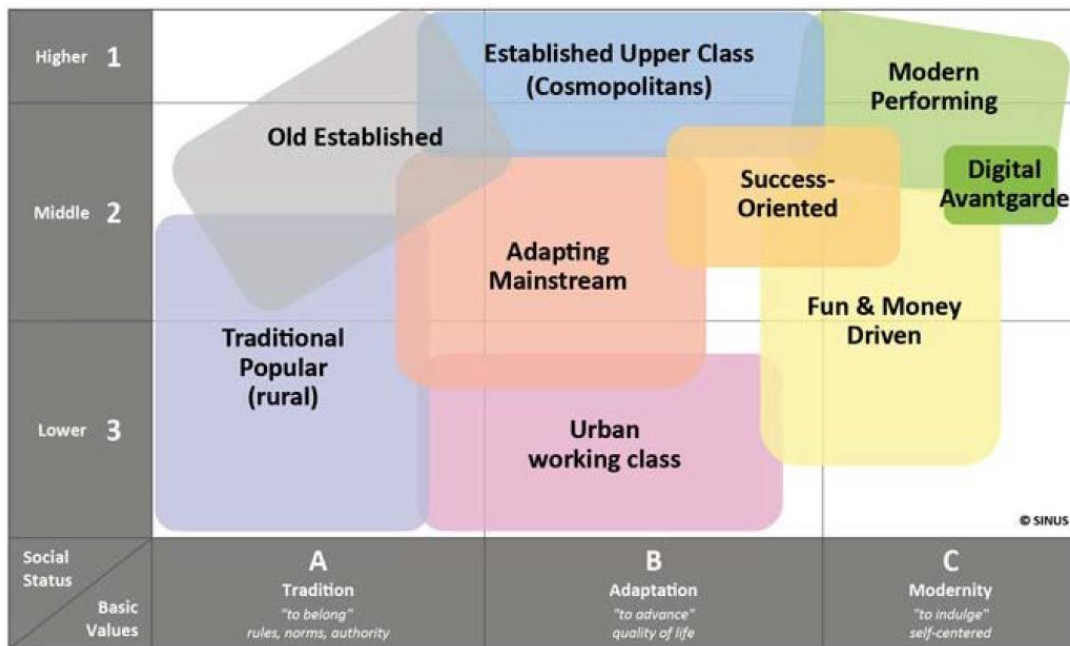


Figure 1: Sinus Milieus in emerging markets (Neubert and Stoll 2015; originally: Sinus-Meta-Milieus weltweit [online]).

### 3.2 From Meso to Micro—From Social Milieus to Language Research

#### *Social Milieus in Nairobi*

As mentioned before, Neubert and Stoll collected empirical data to develop a social milieu cluster for the Global South in Kenya. Following them, Kenya's middle class is characterized by differences in their income, wealth, access to land rights, education, occupations, and access to state resources (Neubert 2019: 28).

Neubert and Stoll decided to build upon the German approach of social milieu, as they see advantages in "their openness for empirical input and the inbuilt for adaptation to every new context. They not only allow, but require, development of the analytical categories on the basis of the empirical material" (Neubert 2019:34). So far, Neubert and Stoll have identified at least six social milieus<sup>20</sup> characterized by a variety of parameters<sup>21</sup>. These social milieus do not mirror the society completely, but should be seen as ideal types. People tend to belong to one or the other milieu but usually do not fit completely to one description.

Neubert and Stoll mention the parameters for analyzing social milieus in their 2015 publication (Neubert and Stoll 2015: 9; Flaig et al. 1993: 71). These parameters include social positioning, values, everyday practices, aspirations, orientations, norms, ways of life and ideals. Based on these parameters, the concept of building blocks (Flaig et al. 1993: 71) was applied and new

<sup>20</sup> An overview of these social milieus can be found at the end of this chapter.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Appendix A for a more detailed description of their parameters.

groups—social milieus—were developed. Here it is to notice that the parameters used in the Kenyan context differ from the original German ones as they have been adjusted to the field of study (Neubert and Stoll 2015). While in 2015 Neubert and Stoll had primarily identified the most visible milieus—Christian Religious Milieu and the Neo-Traditionalist-Milieu—Spronk (2012) had already characterized the Young Professional Milieu. By 2017 Stoll had further established the milieus and mapped six of them: Christian Religious, Stability-Oriented Pragmatics, Cosmopolitan Liberals, Neo-Traditionals, Social Climbers, Young Professionals (Neubert and Stoll 2018; Stoll 2017a; Stoll 2018b;). The following figure shows a mapping of these identified milieus within the middle income strata. Some of the milieus do overlap due to shared characteristics. A mapping of these milieus found in Nairobi can be seen in figure 2.

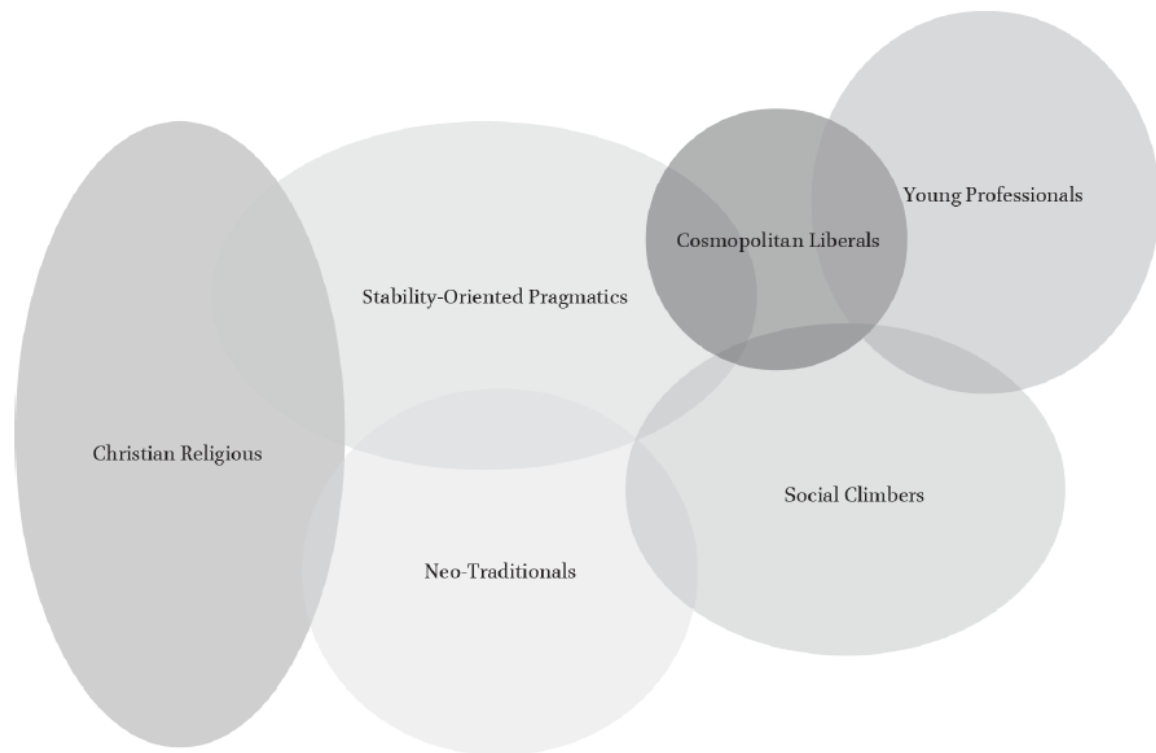


Figure 2: Milieus in Nairobi (Stoll 2018b: 287).

*Young Professionals* are characterized by a hedonistic lifestyle and are often quite young and business oriented (usually involved with international businesses). They have ambitious aims in life and are often located in the upper-middle classes (Spronk 2012; Stoll 2016: 209-211; Stoll 2017a; Stoll 2018b: 291-294;).

The *Liberal Cosmopolitans* focus on their careers and education. They often work in NGOs and have liberal political views and strong social networks (also over-sea) (Neubert and Stoll 2018: 71).

For members of the *Pragmatic Milieu*, the nuclear family is of high importance and career is less important. Consequently, consumption patterns are also moderate and investments is less likely (the Pragmatics count rather to the lower middle class). They often stay within their ethnic groups and have strong relations to their rural homes (Neubert and Stoll 2018: 72).

Similarly, the *Neo-Traditional Milieu* has a strong entanglement to their rural homes and often ethnic belonging is important for their political engagement. Concerning finances, they “feel obligated to share their income with their extended family” (Stoll 2017b: 93; cf. Stoll 2017a: 45-48).

Members of the *Social Climber Milieu* focus on saving money and accepting work with long hours to achieve a moderate standard of living (Stoll 2017a: 48-52; Stoll 2017b: 93).

The *Christian Religious Milieu* is characterized by an outstanding importance of Christian norms and participation in church activities for its members. Economic wealth is seen as a present from God and as something positive because the person is favored by God (Stoll 2016: 204-208; Stoll 2017b: 93; Stoll 2018b: 288-291).

Even though this list does not comprehensively characterize the milieus, it provides a solid foundation for milieu analysis in Nairobi. Furthermore, it illustrates that within the same income strata a heterogeneous spectrum of lifestyles, orientations and norms influence the way of living.

### **3.3 Limits of the Social Milieu Approach in Nairobi**

To apply the social milieu approach to middle classes in Nairobi was rooted in the heterogeneity of African middle classes and the aim to picture this inhomogeneity. Originally, this approach was developed in Germany to replace class and *Schicht* concepts (Stoll 2016: 213). Thereby, Hradil (1987), Vester (2001) and Schulze (1992) argue that milieus are defined by clear boundaries which distinguish different milieus (e.g. aims in life, orientations, leisure activities) (Stoll 2016: 213-214). While class and *Schicht* analysis was mainly based on socio-economic data, milieu studies picture socio-cultural diversity. Within the African context, however, clear boundaries between different milieus do not exist as milieu specific characteristics overlap more than in the European context. Even though an overlap of characteristics exists, one milieu specific aspect might be stronger than others and thus an allocation is possible (cf. Stoll 2016: 214).

In order to picture the socio-cultural aspects of social milieus, Stoll uses the concept of *Interactional Ritual Chain* by Collins (Collins 1981; Collins 2004). Combining this approach

with language choice, many parallels can be identified in everyday situations. Language choices resembling small-life-worlds and have similar characteristics: they differ between places, time, setting but have structures and behavior patterns in common (cf. Stoll 2016: 197). Although the parameters of the social milieus enlisted language use as one of the adjustments for milieu analysis in the Global South, this has barely been applied yet (despite first vague observations by Neubert 2019 and Spronk 2012). Nevertheless, particularly in multilingual settings language choice expresses more than the actual context. In fact, it has a symbolic and social meaning, similarly to other choices of lifestyle (such as fashion, leisure time activities etc.).

Albeit I acknowledge that the theory and concept of social milieus originates from Germany, Europe, applying and adjusting it to different cultural contexts still enables to describe social structures.

As Stoll and Collins argue, micro-analysis provides access to explain and understand macro-studies. Thus, an analysis of accounts of language choices—which is located on an interactional microlevel—enables us to have a deeper understanding of meso and macro milieus in general.

### **3.4 Microlevel Research on Languages Choice within Multilingual Settings**

After the sociological insight, this subchapter provides an introduction to sociolinguistic studies. I provide an overview to language studies in multilingual settings and focus on studies of self-accounts of language choice in particular.

#### *Self-accounts of languages as a Microstudy*

(Socio-)linguistic study is divided into micro and macro approaches. Thereby, the macrolevel takes the whole community into consideration and observes the system, such as language planning and language policy. Meanwhile, the microlevel focuses on individual speakers and how they embody languages, how they adjust to the discourse as well as individual language acquisition and use (cf. Enfield 2005: 315; Kuo and Jernudd 1993:1).

In his famous ‘Frame Analysis’ (1974), Goffman laid the foundation for talk analysis. He focuses on face-to-face interactions and how people (re-)act verbally and non-verbally. Furthermore, Goffman sees the speech acts as a kind of performances<sup>22</sup>, a setting where both, actor and audience (the speaking person and interlocutor) “play” a role shaped by time and place (Goffman 1974: 508). Interestingly, so far language and speech were regarded from an

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<sup>22</sup> This aspect of performance also plays an important role in language choice as elaborated later (cf. chapter 5.2.2).

outward perspective. The actual action was described from the observer's point of view. However, looking at self-accounts of language choice, that describes the inner-perspective of someone on his language choice behavior provides insights into the meaning a language has for people. Thereby, self-accounts of language choice ask for a metaperspective. Thus, participants reflect their own speaking behavior (cf. Yaguello 1998: 2). Although it remains unclear to which extent language choices are conscious or unconscious actions, the reflection about which language one would use provides profound insights into the meaning a language has for someone. Therefore, the term language will be defined next.

### *The Origin of 'a' Language*

Since its emergence as a scientific discipline, humanity was interested in the human being and its languages. Herder, who won a writing competition in the 18<sup>th</sup> century with “Essay on the Origin of Language [Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache]” argues that there is “one nation—one language” (Herder 2015 [1772]).<sup>23</sup> This picture of monolingualism might be applicable for Europe—especially during the time of nation-building (cf. Herder 2015 [1772]) (Gal 2006: 63; Anchimbe and Janney 2011: 1542). Looking at countries in the Global South, we recognize that this concept is not universal but societies are characterized by a huge variety of ethnic groups and thus different languages (Fasold 1984: 30). Among these different languages, standard versions of a language were described as “pure” and “the” language of a nation. While different definitions of a standard language exist, Montgomery sees a standard language as “a dialect that has assumed ascendancy within a language or speech community to such an extent that its internal rules become the standard of correctness for the whole community.” (Montgomery 2019: 123). Moreover, Barasa and Smakram add that a standard language is “a linguistic norm which a very large speech community overly adheres to” (Barasa and Smakman 2016: 23). Furthermore, they develop the Haugen's language standardization definition from monolingual societies (Haugen 1966) and argue that also code-switching can be a norm and thus, seen as a standard. Consequently, these definitions have in common that standard languages are one way of speaking which is set as a norm for a specific group of people.

Even though different languages were spoken simultaneously within Europe, and in particular Germany, where Herder came from, many languages are still used today, some languages have

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<sup>23</sup> Herder (1772) gives answers to human origin and identity which originates in language. Thereby, he lay a foundation for science and asserted “colonial authorities abroad” (Errington 2008: 49).

been picked and standardized by linguists (Inoue 2006; Silverstein 1996). Despite the fact that numerous versions of a language existed, European linguists developed grammar and dictionary to define standard languages. In contrast, however, Labov (1972), Silverstein (1996), Inoue (2006) and Blommaert (2009) among other scholars concluded their research on spoken languages in African and non-African contexts, that no standard version of a language exists, as such as individual speakers show personal varieties.

### *Analyzing Spoken Language*

To be able to describe a speaking process, early linguists such as the structuralist Saussure segmented the speaking act (1964 [1916]). He differentiates between *parole* and *langue*. For him, *langue* is the abstract description of different language types such as grammar. *Langue* is a social institution, independent from the individual speaker (Barthes 2013: 8; Montgomery 2019: 69). In contrast, *parole* points at the spoken word, depending on its context (Gal 2006: 175; Saussure 1964 [1916]).<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, Saussure developed a theory about *signs*: the *signifier* and *signified*, thus the *signifier* is the sound of a word, and the *signified*, is the empirical concept behind it. For this work, the idea of *signifier* and *signified* will play a role in the analysis in chapter 5, as it opens the way to understand spoken language as such as a *signifier* for a deeper meaning which is transported through speaking. Through referring to Saussure's concept, one can explain speaking acts as performances that transmit meaning. I will outline this later using the example of Social Climbers (cf. chapter 5.2).

In the 1960s Gumperz was among the first to analyze the interactional aspect of different ways of speaking. Linguists described this interactional aspect that becomes visible in terms of language choices, styles, and dialects as linguistic repertoires or registers (Busch 2012: 2; Blom and Gumperz 1972; Blommaert and Rampton 2011: 4-5). Gumperz and others concluded that situational changes are reflected in the speaking act, thus in interactions (cf. Agha 2005; Gumperz 1972). Fishman describes these different linguistic registers as *language domains*—variations depending on time and space of the speech event (Fishman 1965; Canagarajah 2018: 33; Blommaert 2009: 416). Besides apparently bounded languages such as English and French, language repertoires may also include non-standard versions such as dialects, regio and sociolects (Gal 1978: 3; Gal and Woolard 2001: 1). Thus, for instance specific ways of wording and pronunciation mark regional differences and the social environment of a speaker are

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<sup>24</sup> In this work, *parole* will be the core object, as it is about the spoken word, not about the linguistic grammar behind it.



recognizable. Canagarajah adds that "repertoires are not representational but performative. Rather than coming with loaded with values and meanings, they generate meanings in situated use" (Canagarajah 2018: 48).

Besides Saussure's structural approach to language, however, recent linguists explain speaking and languages in more practice-driven ways and thereby question the concept of 'pure' languages. This can be seen in the debate on Englishes—a different variety of the English language worldwide (Budohoska 2014; Seargeant 2012). For instance the differentiation between American and British English as well as Kenyan English and Nigerian English illustrates the varieties of different Englishes. Errington and Anchimbe among others have been breaking up the boundaries of a language and thereby started the strain of post-colonial linguistics (Errington 2001; Errington 2008; Anchimbe 2007). Busch (2012) is among the scholars who follow the concept of super-diversity and refers to Butler (1997) and Derrida (1998) by deconstructing 'a language'. Instead of speaking about 'a language', she suggests to take one's language portrait in consideration and to focus on individual biographic aspects. Therefore, languages and codes have to be analyzed in relation to one another and are rather dynamic than static (Bush 2012).

### *Language Repertoires and Language Choice in Multilingual Settings*

As mentioned before, so far most linguistic research has been conducted in monolingual settings. However, most parts of the world—for instance Kenya—are multilingual; several languages and ways of speaking coexist. This chapter illustrates different ways how (socio-)linguists have analyzed phenomena in multi-lingual contexts so far.

One way to explain the switch from one language to another is called *code-switching*. Hereby a person decides on a situational basis to continue to talk in another language. Contrary, *code-mixing* describes the speech when "‘pieces’ of one language are used while a speaker is basically using another language" (Fasold 1984: 180). This concept implies that a language is regarded as a code. While people speak, they often mix and switch between these codes in their daily interactions to express one's own identity (Barasa 2015: 44; Myers-Scotton 2006; Wei 2005). If mixing is limited to a few words, linguists speak of *borrowing* (Fasold 1984: 180). Nevertheless, even within one language there might be variations, so-called intra-language variations (Fasold 1984: 181). The linguist Rampton builds upon these concepts and says that code-switching and code-mixing do not satisfactorily explain recent phenomena—especially in societies with more than one language. He shaped the term *crossing* that implies

for him that people pick from the language and way of speaking from another group<sup>25</sup> (Montgomery 2019: 27; Rampton 1995; Rampton 1999; Rampton 2013; Bush 2012: 3). Following Rampton's move to focus on communicative practice and emphasizing the rather floating entanglement of different languages, Canagarajah speaks about *translingualism*. For him this is defined as “a shift from structural assumption to consider more mobile, expansive, situated, and holistic practices” (Canagarajah 2018: 31). Metrolingualism is a similar approach (Otsuji and Pennycook 2010). Otsuji and Pennycook stress the special aspect of language use—seeing the metropolis as a place where people “play with and negotiate identities through language” (Otsuji and Pennycook 2010: 240).

### *Language Ideology*

Often these specific ways of speaking come with language ideologies. Ideology in this sense describes the process of “understanding how our thoughts and feelings about language are tied into our social lives, our biographies, and histories” (Rampton and Holmes 2019: 4). Or as Gal states it, speech situations are surrounded by “social, spatial and physical features” (Gal 2006: 176). Language is not a singular unit but enwoven into our lives and thereby languages get a specific understanding of their meanings and implications.

However, languages should not only be seen as a distinction marker between people but rather as a way of uniting people. Anderson calls these groups of people with a similar way of speaking *imagined community* (Anderson 2016 [1983]). He argues that language “creates solidarity among followers”. (Anderson 2016 [1983]:153). Thus, people are connected like a community as they bound through the way of speaking. While Anderson focuses on the language aspect, Mendoza-Denton widens the community term and likes all “ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations” create a *community of practice* (Mendoza-Denton 2008: 210-211). Additionally, Silverstein coins this community term as *speech communities* that is “sharing a set of norms or regularities for interactions by means of language(s)” (Silverstein 1966: 285).

### *Studying Accounts of Language Choice*

Most of the (linguistic) studies mentioned in the previous chapter work with mixed methods; namely, sound-recordings, observations and the analysis of data. Most linguistic studies thereby focus on syntax, grammar and lexica and aim to identify behavior patterns. Meanwhile

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<sup>25</sup> A group that does not include the speaker.

information about the *sign* (Saussure (1964[1916])) gets lost—it is not explicitly expressed by the interviewees why they speak a certain language in a specific setting and what this means to them.

In my work, I will refer to languages as categories that are differentiable from one another as this corresponds with the way my interviewees used the terms to describe languages such as Sheng, English and Swahili. In consequence, my work does not analyze the linguistic parameters of the language entanglement, but focuses on the meaning that is expressed by speaking a certain language. These results are then brought in contrast to the milieu describing parameters found by previous researchers. Thus, this work raises the question the logic of social milieus differs from the logic of accounts of language choice and how these different logics distinguish the social milieus among each other.

In conclusion, this approach does not only enable me to get insights into speaking a certain language for Nairobi’s middle class, but interviews on self-accounts of language choices as well as observations also offered a suitable way for me in terms of access to information, research ethics and work load.

#### **4. Research design**

From a methodological perspective, this work is based on an analysis of literature and existing studies as well as empirical field research in Nairobi (10<sup>th</sup> June to 4<sup>th</sup> September 2019).<sup>26</sup> The prior chapters illustrated existing studies and theories, thus in the following, I will lay out my methods and challenges during the field research in Nairobi. Then I will comment on the way of data analysis, which I used to evaluate the empirical data.

##### **4.1 Field Research**

###### *Access to the Field*

In general, I had a smooth way into my field research as I had been to Nairobi before my research. I, furthermore, had contacts from prior researches (Neubert and Stoll)<sup>27</sup> to which I was linked.

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<sup>26</sup> My research stay was generously funded by the German Academic Exchange Program (DAAD) and the research approval as well as the Ethical Clearance was sponsored by the Technical University of Berlin as part of the research project “Biographies of the Middle classes: Experiences of Space over the Course of a Lifetime” by Prof. Dr. Gunter Weidenhaus and M.A. Claudia Mock.

<sup>27</sup> Since 2015, I worked as a student research assistant at the Bayreuth Academy of Advanced African Studies for Neubert and Stoll within the project of “Rising Middle Class—Social Milieus in Nairobi”.

Kapiszewski et al. (2015) differentiate in their guide on field research between three different lengths of being in the field. Staying in Nairobi for a medium length of three months gave me the chance to gain a moderate experience of the context, and to get familiar with networks and local contacts. First of all, access to the field was not time consuming, as I already did (literature) research about Nairobi before, visited the city twice (in 2013 and in 2016) and knew several people living there. Additionally, I already spoke the two local languages—English and Swahili. I acquired a third language—Kikuyu—in its basics during the first weeks in Nairobi. Furthermore, I had time to schedule (and reschedule) interviews and identify interesting dynamics and fields for further follow-up projects (cf. Kapiszewski et al. 2015: 99-105; 351-352). Finally, a three month stay granted me time to establish a network with local scholars and other researchers who conducted field work at the same time. These contacts have been very valuable in terms of reflection and adjustment of the research methods.

I spent the first three weeks at the language school of the Anglican Church Kenya learning Kikuyu, thereafter I moved for a week into the student's flat share and then into a private apartment. In the last week of my research stay in Nairobi, I lived in an Airbnb hosted by a local family. While I barely conducted any interviews during the time in the language school, I utilized the time to become familiar with the environment.

### *Participatory Observations and Interviews*

In terms of data collection, I used a threefold methodology: (participative) observation (cf. Malinowski 1979), semi-structured interviews (cf. Gerson and Horowitz 2002), and informal talks (Spittler 2001).

Since the beginning of (anthropological) field research, Malinowski points out the importance of local language ability and the advantages of staying in the field as a participating observer (Malinowski 1979; cf. Bernard 2006: 350ff.; Newman and Ratliff 2001:4f.). Additionally, Blommaert (2010) and Hymes (1972) emphasize that the study of language should always be the study of “language *as well as* of society” (Blommaert and Jie 2010: 5). This meant spending quite an amount of time participating in everyday life and observing language use in public spaces. Using Clarke's method of mapping, I identified crucial places for my focus group (Clarke 2011). Thus, I participated in church activities<sup>28</sup>, listened carefully to conversations while being on the market, in supermarkets, on-campus and the streets and spent time in coffee

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<sup>28</sup> I participated in several Sunday services within various dominations and jointed a bi-weekly bible-brunch-group.

shops—such as Java houses—listening to the language chosen in everyday situations (cf. Bernard 2006: 368ff.). I note all of these experiences in my field diary with additional notes of observations and transcripts of conversations I overheard. Furthermore, I visited two families within their home setting, accompany one interviewee to his office and join others for their leisure activities (hiking and boxing club).

Besides (participatory) observation, I gained information through conducting interviews. Hereby, I differentiate between expert interviews and informant interviews.<sup>29</sup> My overall aim was to understand the lifeworlds of my participants from an inner perspective (cf. Flick 1996: 28ff.).

The semi-structured interviews allowed me to guide through the interview focusing particularly on language within various parts of life and meanwhile to offer the informant to deepen aspects s/he thinks are important (cf. Bernard 2006: 212). My question guideline<sup>30</sup> was inspired by Gal (1978) among other sociolinguistic studies. Thereby, I focused on metalinguistic activities, thus, letting people reflect their own language behavior (cf. Yaguello 1998: 2). As it was important for me to gain insights into the view on language choice of my participants, I decided to work with interviews capturing the interviewees opinions rather than writing a linguistic ethnography about code-switching and which language is actually spoken. However, the interviews are complimented with ethnographic data and observations that were kept in field diaries (cf chapter 4). I acknowledge that people's actual behavior might not be pictured in my study and how people think they speak, and how they actually speak might differ notably. Nevertheless, the meaning of speaking a certain language is also expressed by their accounts of language choice. Analyzing these self-accounts of language choice, a certain bias emerges as interviewees might try to transmit a certain perspective and aim to give the 'right' answer. For instance, they might emphasize that they do speak a lot of English although they do not. Additionally, it might have happened that people gave me wrong information. However, through the number of interviews I conducted, I assume that overlap of similar answers minimize this bias. I aimed to minimize these biases by building an atmosphere of mutual trust. For me, these self-accounts were important as they give insights into meanings of languages and how languages co-constitute belonging in one's own perspective.

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<sup>29</sup> As expert interviews I classified anyone who works within the field of Swahili and language teaching. Beside asking them about their personal language behavior, I added some more abstract questions and valued the discussions with them to reflect my results. However, I did not transcribe these interviews in the end but used the information to contextualize the information of my other interviews.

<sup>30</sup> A guideline of my semi-structured questions can be found in the appendix B.

Thus, looking at these speech interactions and asking people reflect on which language they choose for communication illustrate the meanings languages have for them. Besides these formal interviews, I had several informal conversations which occurred spontaneously while interacting with local citizens. These conversations were very valuable in addition to the interviews and I kept note of them and other observations in my field research diary (cf. Spittler 2001; Blommaert and Jie 2010).

### *Sample*

I applied the ‘theoretical sample’ by Glaser and Strauss (1967; 1998: 53) in my research. I chose the sample while I was in the field, and only limited the sample by the frame to focus on middle class members in Nairobi (cf. Flick 2012: 159). Thus, through my sample, the choice of my interviewees, I gained access to interviewees in various ways. I combined contacts gained during the time at the language school with interviewees from Stoll’s research, who served as a starting point. These interviewees then linked me to further informants through snowball sampling<sup>31</sup>. As they were often friends or family members of the former interviewees, a level of mutual trust was immediately given (cf. Bernard 2006: 192-193).<sup>32</sup>

After conducting the first interviews, I transcribed and analyzed them to thereafter adjusted my way of interviewing people (cf. Kapiszewski 2015: 336f.). For instance, I added the questions about feelings in relation to language choice as it occurred numerous times within my interviews. After conducting around thirty interviews, I took a break for about one week, spent time with my data and decided to focus on missing data such as older people and male participants for the second half of my stay.<sup>33</sup>

Being aware of the fact, that my sample (the case-control sampling as well as the snowball-sample) could be biased, I additionally conducted interviews with experts and key informants working in the field of language use within the urban setting to reflect on my results together with local experts.

I did not define the numbers of interview prior to the research (cf. Flick 2012: 161), but noticed a beginning theoretical saturation after about fifty interviews. From this point on I only conducted additional interviews with specific cases which were underrepresented in my sample. In order to have a meaningful result, I did not analyze all my data but chose to focus

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<sup>31</sup> Also known as Respondent-driven-Sampling (RDS).

<sup>32</sup> I acknowledge that RDS brings a bias into the sample as only a specific group was chosen. Nevertheless, in combination with the contacts at the university and people met at other occasions a diverse sample was guaranteed.

<sup>33</sup> While looking for specific people to interview (e.g. living in a specific neighborhood, certain age-group etc.) the RDS was very useful, as contacts could be elaborated very fast.

on two specific groups within my sample namely the social milieu of the Young Professionals and the Social Climbers (cf. Flick 2012: 159; Glaser and Strauss 1967;1998:55).

## **4.2 My Role in the Field**

### *Reflections on my Role in the Field*

Margaret Mead (1986) points out that gender plays a role in field research because it can open doors, but also limits access to certain information or influence the perspective of the interviewees (cf. Bernard 2006: 373). I experienced my femaleness as a door opener with other females, and it strengthened an atmosphere of trust and openness. When I interviewed men, it was important to set boundaries to keep our conversations on a professional level.

Bernhard stresses that any kind of personal character makes a difference in the field (Bernard 2006: 375). Besides being female, also being white and thus obviously visible as a non-local influenced the setting of my research. Because my whiteness tended to influence language settings, I decided to rather focus on interviews than shadowing people. Nevertheless, I took this visible fact of being a foreigner as a distance marker which gave me a professional distance to the informants. Thus, emphasizing the point that I came to Nairobi conducting the interviews to learn about their perspectives. Being a visible outsider gave me the chance to introduce myself as a learner. My language abilities and my 'cultural knowledge' meanwhile supplied me with tools for getting involved with the informants and even (partly) become part of their community as a participatory observer.

Besides my whiteness and my female gender also my young age had an impact on my research. Regarding my age, I tried to gain authenticity as a researcher by pointing at the affiliated institutions and my study background. At the same time, my age allowed me to claim a certain naiveté while asking questions and underlining the fact, that even as a Master student I am still learning. As the population of Nairobi is quite young, my age was rather a door opener than a challenge.

However, I also acknowledge that my personality and my appearance might have influenced the answers of my participants. Some interviewees might try to give the answers they expect the researcher wants to hear. Through the number of interviews and my language expertise I tried to minimize this bias, although I cannot totally expel it.

### *Challenges during the Field Research*

One of the first challenges I faced was to find interviewees who were willing to provide me with long-term recordings of their speech acts—as it was my initial plan to have long-time recordings of speech-acts. After several people were skeptical, I decided to change my approach and to conduct interviews first and meanwhile gain some trust. Instead of long-term recordings, some interview-partner offered me to send me recordings of conversations with their friends and families (1-10min long). However here I see the challenge of not having the consent of everyone being recorded, wherefore I decided to take these recordings as a control for myself and double-check for contextualizing the interviews, but not to evaluate these audios for the Master's thesis.

Another challenge I was facing during the stay in the field and especially while evaluating the data, is the huge number of interviews and collected data (cf. Blommaert 2010). While I already had a good number of interviews with a lot of valuable information after three weeks, I decided not to stop even though it would probably be sufficient data for a Master's thesis. Rather, I thought of widening my research and not to limit my interviewees to 'middle class' but to get a larger variety of people in terms of the neighborhood they are living in and their age, thus to have be able to contextualize the interviewees of the middle class milieus.

## **4.3 Data Analysis**

### *Overview of Collected Data*

In total, I was able to interview 61 people, and 60 interviews were recorded.<sup>34</sup> Most of these interviews were done on a one-by-one basis. Two were conducted with two or more interviewees at the same time, due to the circumstances which did not allow a one-by-one interview. Even though I have to take this into account while analyzing the interviews, it also enriches the study to see the reactions of the respective other to the answers. The age of the interviewees reaches from early 20s to around 70 years. Most of the interviewed people were in their 20s or 30s. Furthermore, the sample also contains four families (one family observation and interview lasted a full day), twice two sisters, and one mother and her grown-up daughter. The other interviewees, however, do not stand in any further relation, besides the fact that some go to the same university, the same church, or the same hiking club. My sample includes people

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<sup>34</sup> One person did not agree to be recorded. Therefore, I took detailed notes of her answers. I did not pay the interviewees, although, I paid drinks or lunch for them when we met at a public place for the interview.



from various backgrounds—in terms of occupation<sup>35</sup>, neighborhood, and faith<sup>36</sup>. Even though most can be counted as middle class, some contrasting examples can be found from people who rather belong to lower classes.

My interviews were conducted in English and Swahili. The language was chosen by the interviewees. In addition to these interviews, around fifteen audios of conversations (-parts) have been recorded.<sup>37</sup> Most of them were provided by the interviewees as I was not present during the time of recording. These audio-data is accompanied by three note books of fieldnotes, a diary and protocols of the interviews.

### *Transcription and Coding of the Interviews*

After conducting the first interviews, I transcribed them using the transcription guidelines by Bohnsack (2000: 233f.).<sup>38</sup> In order to reduce the sample size, I decided to focus on interviewees who lived at least six months in Nairobi<sup>39</sup> (cf. Kuckartz 2014). By choosing these people, Kenyan nationality was not among my selection criteria as Nairobi is characterized by many internationals living in this city. This variety is also reflected in the interviews that I conducted.<sup>40</sup> Additionally, I decided to concentrate on the informant interviews. Thus, I did not transcribe the expert's interview, but used them to contextualize the other interviews. After minimizing my sample size, 37 interviews remained that I transcribed.

Next, I used the computer-based program MAXQDA for coding my qualitative data. During the coding process, I used deductive codes that I established before and inductive codes that I added while coding. I formulated subcodes and additional categories (Kelle and Kluge 2010: 73ff.)<sup>41</sup>. In doing so, I was able to focus on my research question and meanwhile be open to new results and observations (cf. Kuckartz 2014: 61-69).

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<sup>35</sup> The sample includes housewives, lawyers, government officials, doctor, priests, students and others.

<sup>36</sup> Even though the sample includes an Imam and a few Muslims, the majority identified themselves as Christians (of various denominations).

<sup>37</sup> As I do not have a written consensus of everyone being hearable in the audio-recording, I will not analyze or quote parts of it in my Master's thesis, however, it was a valuable source for contextualizing the interviews.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Tannen (2005) and Gordon (2011) who emphasize the importance of transcribing interviews to analyze them.

<sup>39</sup> Here I define Nairobi as the city parts. I excluded people who live in another county and commute for work. Further, I excluded people living in informal settlements such as Kibera. This selection was done in order to have a focus on 'middle class' and be able to contextualize my results within the middle class study from Bayreuth.

<sup>40</sup> The data includes interviews with people who considered themselves as Asian (twice), one from Eritrea and one from Tanzania.

<sup>41</sup> An overview of my codes can be found in the appendix (Appendix J *List of Codes*).

Additionally, I summarized important key data such as age, place of living, time spent in Nairobi, ethnicity and education level in extra charts. These tables also included information about language choice and interlocutors as well as language choice and feelings.<sup>42</sup>

### *Re-defining the Sample—Contrasting Two Cases*

During the coding process, I kept memos and continuously wrote case summaries outlining the main aspects of the different cases (Kuckartz 2014: 55). Thereby, I identified different case combinations and, in the end, I distinguished between six main types<sup>43</sup> (cf. Kelle and Kluge 2010: 91-107). These types were characterized by an inner homogeneity, and an external heterogeneity between the groups (Kelle and Kluge 2010: 85).

In order to have meaningful results, I decided to focus on two types that had characteristics similarly to two social milieus identified by Neubert and Stoll (2015). I called attention to the milieu of the Social Climbers and the milieu of Young Professionals. I have chosen these two social milieus because they cover people in the middle class who additionally corresponding age group. However, these groups have different lifestyles, norms and orientations. I decided to focus on these two milieus, as they are among the best-researched milieus and it was possible for me to gain access to these milieus to get a decent number of interviewees. Additionally, both of the groups inherent an ideal type—a person who has also been part of the study by Neubert and Stoll—and were, therefore, already characterized as Young Professionals and as Social Climbers (cf. Przyborski and Wohlrab-Sahr 2008: 336). This ideal type person was of great help for me to ensure the allocation of my sample interviews.

Even though I worked with only a few limitations during my sampling procedure, I narrowed the sample while coding and analyzing it. Thereby, I used the structure of qualitative content analysis for the final version of my codes (cf. Kuckartz 2014; Flick 2012: 409; Mayring 1983). After I had identified the two types for my case study, I followed the coding and evaluation steps as explained by Kuckartz (2014).

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<sup>42</sup> These charts can be found in the appendix of this thesis (Appendix C *Overview of all conducted interviews*; Appendix D *Young Professionals—Demographic Data*, Appendix E *Social Climbers—Demographic Data*, Appendix F *Young Professionals—Language Choice and Interlocutor*, Appendix H *Social Climbers—Language Choice and Interlocutor*, Appendix I *Social Climbers and Young Professionals—Language Choice and Feelings*).

<sup>43</sup> (1) Young professional, (2) students with Young Professional perspectives, (3) Social Climbers born in Nairobi, (4) Social Climbers born up-country, (5) family parents, (6) elderly people with grown-ups.

## **5. Accounts of Language Choices among Young Professionals and Social Climbers**

In this chapter, I make use of my own collected data during field-work in Nairobi in 2019. After recoding the interviews, I mapped them—people with the same biographies, objectives, views of life, and lifestyles. These groups resemble the categories of social milieus characterized by Neubert and Stoll (2015). Thus, I take their description and findings as a basis to contrast them with my findings.

In the first part of this chapter, I look at the social milieu of the so-called Young Professionals. In the second part my focus is on the Social Climbers. Looking at the individual groups, I first give a broad description of the milieu based on literature and own observations. Next, I provide an overview over my data and examine three characteristics of the milieu I overserved.

Finally, I will contrast both groups and thereby have a closer look at language choice: is their belonging to a specific group shaping the language choice or rather is the way they speak shaping the group they belong to?

### **5.1 Young Professionals**

#### **5.1.1 Characteristics of Young Professionals**

The Young Professionals is a rather young social milieu that was established around 2000 with the increasing urbanization of Nairobi (Stoll 2018b: 291-293). While other milieus such as the Christian Milieu can also be found in other towns and cities, the Young Professionals are typically for Nairobi (Stoll 2018b: 283; 287-288; Neubert 2019: 381). Members of this milieu are mostly children of Nairobi city vendors in the second or third generation and between 20 and 35 years old<sup>44</sup> (Neubert 2019: 377; Spronk 2012: 64; Stoll 2016: 209; Neubert and Stoll 2013: 2128). As they are usually single and without children, they can grow out of this milieu at a certain age due to changes in their life-course e.g., marriage, children, job frustration, or failed businesses (Neubert 2019: 377; Neubert 2019: 382; Neubert and Stoll 2013: 2129). Nevertheless, there are also exceptions such as married members and people who did not grow up in Nairobi, but nevertheless belong to this milieu (Stoll 2018b: 291-292).<sup>45</sup>

Typically, Young Professionals received a good education and graduated university (Neubert 2019: 377; Spronk 2012: 64; Neubert and Stoll 2013: 2128). Now, they are either working as professionals in a private business, as entrepreneurs, in international NGOs, or within the finance and IT-sector. In these branches they earn relatively high salaries (Neubert and Stoll

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<sup>44</sup> The age bracket differs between 20 to 35 years. The core age seems to be 25 to 30 years.

<sup>45</sup> Young Professionals who grow up outside Nairobi exists but are the minority.

2013: 2128; Stoll 2018b: 291-292; Neubert 2019: 176).<sup>46</sup> Often their work is characterized by global relations and travels to Europe and North America (Stoll 2018b: 291-292). These worldwide entanglements can also be seen among their friends as Young Professionals use to have numerous international friends (Stoll 2016: 209). For Young Professionals, family—especially extended family—is not of a high importance; instead heterogeneous friendship with colleagues, and other Young Professionals define their multi-ethnic social networks (Neubert 2019: 377; Stoll 2016: 209; 13).<sup>47</sup> After long working hours, Young Professionals enjoy a hedonistic lifestyle, spending their leisure time in clubs, bars, and restaurants in the Central Business District, Kilimani and Westlands, as well as social gatherings. (Stoll 2016: 209; Stoll 2018b: 291-292; Neubert 2019: 377-378). Conspicuous consumption patterns are not only visible in the cost of these events (Neubert 2019: 377) but also in their display of fashion and high quality consumer goods: colorful, tight clothes as well as expensive smartphones and cars (Neubert 2019: 377-378; Stoll 2016: 209-210). In short, using a “significant proportion of their income for visible consumption” (Neubert 2019: 380) is typical for Young Professionals.

Due to their origin within wealthier families and stable income, Young Professionals are located in the upper-middle class (Neubert 2019: 37-38; 382). They regard themselves as modern. However, some Young Professionals are nonetheless religious or connected to ethnic traditions (Neubert 2019: 377; 384-385; Spronk 2009: 511; Stoll 2016: 211; Stoll 2018b: 292-293). It is interesting to notice, that members of the Young Professional milieu trust individuals more than networks such as saving groups (Neubert 2019: 377). The focus on the individual can also be observed through their goals. Most Young Professionals imagine themselves in the future as successful and, as they do not have children yet, this image does not include any nuclear family (Neubert 2019: 378; 385). In contrast to the typical middle class, Young Professionals are apolitical and usually do not engage in political debates (Neubert 2019: 377).

My sample of the Young Professionals<sup>48</sup> includes six young adults (26 to 34 years old), of whom five were females. One had just married and two live together with their boyfriends. Two are single and a third recently broke-off her relationship recently. This reflects rather liberal morals in relation to their understanding of partnership. Three of them were born in

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<sup>46</sup> Not everyone in the Nairobi middle class has such a well-paid job—as Spronk emphasizes the Young Professionals build a sup-group that is neither elite nor poor and only covers people in a certain age (Spronk 2012; Neubert 2019: 176-177).

<sup>47</sup> One reason might be that their lifestyles is only affordable by cutting off family networks and distancing themselves from mutual solidarity (Stoll 2018b: 292-293).

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Appendix D *Young Professionals—Demographic Data*.

Nairobi, two moved to the city at the age of two and four, and one came to Nairobi fifteen years ago for his studies. While one is working in the finance sector, two work in international NGOs, one has her own business, one works as a freelancer in real estate and one works as a journalist. All of them have a rather high standard of living, wear fashionable clothes and at least half of them have their own car. Thus, these parameters fit well to Neubert and Stoll and Spronk’s descriptions of Young Professionals.

Within my data, all Young Professionals stated that they speak at least three languages. After English and Swahili (English is most of the times named before Swahili), the majority of them say that they also speak (or at least hear) a vernacular language. Within my sample I could not identify differences among ethnicities.<sup>49</sup> In comparison with other subgroups, it is striking how many of the Young Professionals claim to speak at least one other international language<sup>50</sup> (mostly German and French). While English is very present among the languages they speak, in the interviews with the Young Professionals this language is less emphasized as a language that is spoken in Nairobi (—cf. figure 3).

Interviewee	Languages Interviewee speaks <sup>51</sup>	Languages in Nairobi
No 12	Eng Swa V Int	V Sh
No 14	V Eng Swa	V Swa Eng
No 34	Eng Swa V	Swa Sh Eng
No 41	Swa V Eng Int	V Eng Swa Int
No 49	/	/
No 50	Eng Swa V Int	Swa Sh Eng

Figure 3: Accounts of Language Choice by Young Professionals (by author).

In their everyday life, differences in language choice can be observed in relation to interlocutors<sup>52</sup> as well as in relation to emotions. While talking to elderly people, all respondents speak vernacular languages and Swahili. In discussions with parents, Swahili is the dominant language, but is mixed with English. Another interesting finding is that language choice is more diversified when speaking to sibling and friends. While speaking to siblings and friends, Young Professionals do not mention vernacular languages among the languages they use in this setting. However, they state to choose Swahili and English—as well as partly Sheng. Although their partner is usually in the same age, most of the interviewed people use English

<sup>49</sup> One person, however, does not identify herself as belonging to any ethnic group and thus does not speak any vernacular language.

<sup>50</sup> In this context international language implies major world languages such as Spanish, German, and French.

<sup>51</sup> Eng= English; Swa=Swahili; V=vernacular languages; Int=international languages; Sh=Sheng.

<sup>52</sup> Gal (1979) groups language switching in regards to interlocutors and hierarchies among interlocutors.

in communication with their romantic partners. None of them, however, claim to exclusively use one language, but rather have one predominant language which then varies with topics, places, mood and situations.

In more formal situations, such as speaking to a government official or a doctor, English is generally the language of choice. Only one respondent states that she speaks Swahili to government officials.<sup>53</sup> The opposite is the case speaking to street vendors and market traders: Swahili is the dominant language and English is avoided:

“So, for instance, with my boyfriend, we usually speak in English (...) or we mix, but it is predominantly English. And if we, go to the market together, chances are—because we were having a conversation in English - I'll just ask like "how much are the tomatoes" and in my head I am like "shoot! What did I do" (@) and I automatically, switch or ignore it and I just pray that she did not get offended. But yeah—it happens. [...] So if you speak English for three minutes, it sounds like too much and people in the street will ask, will start saying things like "mmh why they are, they feeling like they are so important, why are they only speaking in English?" you know, such things, and you realize, okay, that was too much English. Turn down. So yes, it happens sometimes. But only with English, not with Swahili.” (Interview No 12 #00:12:41-9#)

This statement does not only show that Young Professionals are speaking English at work and private settings, but it also expresses how there are situations in which certain languages are inappropriate. Nevertheless, there are also disagreements among couples about which language to speak. This especially arises when debating the language with which to raise children together in the future (cf. Interview No 12, 41, 50 and 53). Although none of the respondents have children, nearly all of them speak English to the children in their neighborhood. Couples generally agree to teach their children English, but debate whether or not to teach their children Swahili and vernacular languages (cf. Interview No 12, 41, 50 and 53).

Furthermore, it is interesting that the diversity in their language choice, completely disappears in praying. All immediately responded that if they pray for themselves, they pray in English. None of the participants were able to give an explanation, although English education in school and English church services probably contributed to these results.

Looking at feelings, different languages are dominant or co-dominant. While for all,<sup>54</sup> being professional and serious is connected to English, happiness is mostly expressed in English as well as in a variety of other languages (Swahili, vernacular, Sheng). In romantic situations three quarters of them would use English, while one person finds Swahili more romantic. In contrast,

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<sup>53</sup> While most Young Professionals choose English as it is the official language, this one person states, that Swahili is the national language and would make it easier for the government official. Thus, she would speak Swahili as she thinks it is more appropriate to the situation (Interview No 50).

<sup>54</sup> In this category results are based on four interviewees who answered these questions.

none of the interviewed people would choose English while joking, but instead joke in Swahili or even Sheng. Sheng—a language that is barely spoken by Young Professionals—is also their language of choice to appear hip or cool. Fifty percent would speak Sheng, while the other fifty percent would use English to be seen as cool.

### **5.1.2 Sheng—To be Cool or a Language of Illiterate People?**

Both Spronk and Neubert state that Sheng is one of the main languages spoken by the Young Professionals and functions as one of their distinguishing features (Spronk 2012: 12; 68-69; 276; Neubert 2019: 176; 377). Spronk even states that among the Young Professionals “Sheng is widely and proudly spoken” (Spronk 2012: 68). Thus, she emphasizes the fact that Young Professionals use Sheng frequently and claim Sheng as belonging to them.

Before comparing this statement to my research results, I provide a brief introduction to Sheng. Sheng is a relatively new language that emerged around the 1960s in the eastern townships of Nairobi (King’ei and Kobia 2007: 323; Githinji 2006: 444).<sup>55</sup> Sheng contains parts of Swahili, English and vernacular languages such as Gikuyu and Dholuo (Wairungu 2014: 51-53; Githiora 2018a: 107-117; Abulaziz and Osinde 1997: 43-47; Eratus and Kebeya 2018: 24). However, Sheng is a dynamic and constantly changing language (Odengo 2014; Too and Barno 2016: 157). Kang’ethe-Iraki even claims that every five years the lexicon is replaced (Kanth’etge-Iraki 2004: 57). Today Sheng is used as a term to describe the way of speaking associated with youth living in the urban area (Rudd 2017; Wairungu 2014: 51).

Sheng is more than simple codeswitching between Swahili and English and should be regarded as an own language (Wairungu 2014: 54). Depending on the neighborhood different varieties of Sheng can be identified (Wairungu 2014: 97; Too and Barno 2016: 158). While Sheng started as a secret language among young people in low-income areas, it was quickly picked up by hip-hop musicians and spread through them (Too and Barno 2016: 157; Mose 2013: 107; Merab 2013; Abdualziz and Osinde 1997: 49; Beck 2010: 25; Githinji 2006: 450). Nowadays Sheng can also be found in media, newspaper and advertisements (Mutonya 2008: 6-11; Wairungu 2014: 201). While some scholars around Wairungu claim that Sheng-speakers are until today associated with low-status, illiteracy and stereotypes (Wairungu 2014: 59), Muaka argues that Sheng nowadays has spread all over Kenya and is used by many—in particular by young people—“irrespective of social class or gender” (Muaka 2011: 220; also Beck 2010: 22-

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<sup>55</sup> Other sources state that it emerged later in the 80s or 90s (Too and Barno 2016: 158). Probably the exact date cannot be dated back as Sheng developed as a street-language.

29). Furthermore, scholars differentiate between Sheng and English, whereas the latter one is more oriented towards English and the first one towards Sheng. While during my research no one claimed to ever have heard of English (cf. fieldnotes 12<sup>th</sup> June 2019), Sheng is a common term. Thus, I do not further differentiate between these two linguistic terms in this work.

Looking at the emergence of Sheng, it is surprising that Young Professionals, who are described as cosmopolitan, well-educated and belonging to the upper-middle-income strata, would adopt a language originating from lower class youth. Yet today, Sheng also counts as hip, young and progressive. Now the question is whether Young Professionals pick up this language and speak it proudly, as Spronk states, or if they distance themselves from this language in order to not be seen illiterate and lose their status. Furthermore, a question would be to whom they would speak Sheng: Neubert and Stoll mention that they have many international friends besides their work colleagues. If they speak Sheng to their friends, they rather speak it to their local ones than to the short-term expats.

During my interviews, I discovered that none of the Young Professionals I interviewed, seemed to be strongly attached to Sheng. When asked which languages are spoken in Nairobi and which languages they speak themselves, none of the Young Professionals mention Sheng as a language they speak themselves—however, half of them mention it as a language which is spoken in Nairobi.

For them Sheng is a language spoken in relaxed situations, for making fun and enjoyment. While some describe it as “a local tribe,” (Interview No 12 #00:15:16-8#) others identify it as a kind of “corrupted Swahili” (Interview No 50 #00:02:11-0#). Hereby, it becomes clear that there is no single understanding of what Sheng is, but rather a blurry understanding of what could be Sheng:

“So you will hear a lot of Swahili, a lot of Sheng, corrupted Swahili, so in Nairobi we speak a lot of corrupted Swahili, we call it Sheng, it is just corrupted Swahili, there are words that are not really Swahili but well, we call it Swahili” (Interview No 50 #00:02:11-0#).

One even stated that nowadays Sheng is not only spoken in local minibuses but also in the television—especially in advertisements. Thereby it cannot anymore be identified as such: “You don’t even realize anymore that it is Sheng” (Interview No 14 #00:27:05-7#). Another interview participant added that while speaking to her neighbor she is sometimes unsure if she speaks Swahili or Sheng:

“I’ll see my neighbor, it’s a charming person. I will say to him “hello” in Kiswahili “sasa” – is this Swahili or is it Sheng?” (Interview No 34 #00:22:30-1#).



Beside the fact, that what is counted as Sheng differs, the varieties within Sheng are obvious and no one claims to speak the “deep Sheng”. They might speak a few words and phrases—especially among friends—but none of them refers to “deep Sheng” as their version of Sheng. Today’s Sheng does not seem to be the Sheng of the times that they attended university (cf. Interview No 14 #00:22:31-9#).

Not seeing Sheng as their medium of communication distinguishes them from “mainstream” Nairobians. In a conversation with a young man of the Young Professional milieu he stated “I have to climb down from pure English or Swahili to Sheng to engage and relate with the youth” (field note 10<sup>th</sup> June 2019). This statement does not only rate Sheng as something less valued than “pure English and Swahili” but also gives a reason for using it. Namely, to connect to a specific group of people. According to the results of my research Young Professionals prefer to speak English (or Swahili) (cf. chapter 5.1.3) instead of Sheng. This contradicts with the wide-spread statement of Spronk (2012) and Neubert and Stoll (2015) that Young Professionals would speak a lot of Sheng and identify themselves with these languages. Indeed, some state that they speak Sheng with friends or mix some Sheng words into their sentences. Young Professionals argue that it would be easier for others to understand and follow them if they do so (cf. Interview No 41 #00:23:38-3#). In conclusion, this demonstrates that a mixing and switching of languages among the Young Professionals does exist also between English and Swahili; however, they do not identify this mixing as “Sheng”. In contrast they name it “flat Swahili” and define it as following:

“There is another Swahili that we speak. There is just flat Swahili. Not Sheng.” (Interview No 41 #00:25:42-0#).

This respondent (in Interview No 41), a young business lady, recognizes that she is not speaking Swahili in the sense of a standard Swahili, but refuses to see her way of speaking and code-switching as Sheng. Thus, she implies that there is another ‘Sheng’ which should be counted as the ‘real’ Sheng. Probably, she means the version of Sheng spoken by people in Eastlands, a version of Sheng described as ‘deep Sheng’ by others. Now, the question arises why she is distancing herself that strictly from Sheng and why she does not want to be seen as speaking Sheng. This distancing from Sheng might have different reasons. Among them is probably the fact that Sheng is seen as the language of illiterate people and the lower class. Sheng does not seem fitting and adequate for a middle-class person in her point of view. She does not say that Sheng in general is not good, but it is obviously not proper for her. Another Young Professional added that she finds Sheng even annoying and would not text people back who text her in Sheng. Although this is meant to be “exotic and beautiful”, she thinks this way

of handling languages destroys them (Interview No 49 #00:46:21-7). Furthermore, she adds that she has a different feeling about Sheng than others have. Interviews with other Young Professionals show, that—despite the fact that their way of mixing languages could be named Sheng—they prefer to not be identified with Sheng.

One should note here that it might be that Spronk (2012) observed the actual action and labeled the way Young Professionals speak as Sheng. In contrast, these Young Professionals themselves would not name their way of mixing English and Swahili, Sheng. Here further research would be needed to see if and how this gap of self-description and descriptions by others can be bridged or if these boundaries remain.

### **5.1.3 English and Swahili—Observations on the Official Languages**

Since the colonial period both, English and Swahili played a special role in Kenya. As explained earlier, during the colonial era English was implemented as the official language and was widely used in administration and education (Budohoska 2014: 14-15). During the first years of colonialism, only a minority of Kenyans was able to speak English as the access to English education was limited (Budohoska 2014: 15). Meanwhile Swahili, which was prior an ethnic language from the coast, was spread as a national language. Until after independence, however, it was overshadowed by English. In the year 1974, Swahili and English were both declared as official and national languages as well as languages of the parliament (Wa’Njogu 2004: 61, 70; Bing 2018: 62; Onyango 2005: 219 -220; Constitution of Kenya 2010: 14).

Since 2010, both languages are officially equal, but English remains a higher-prestige language and not all documents are available in both languages (Bing 2018: 63; Wa’Njogu 2004: 69-70; Abudulaziz and Osinde 1997: 43). Budohoska agrees with Githiora (2018b: 236); English is the language of power and Swahili the language of solidarity (Budohoska 2014: 18). According to Budohoska’s results, around 66% of Kenyans speaks Swahili, while only 10-20% speaks English (Budohoska 2014: 18). Although the English-speaking proportion of the population is likely to be higher in Nairobi than elsewhere in Kenya, the implication is still the same, that English is rather a prestige language and Swahili the language of solidarity (Githiora 2002: 176). Thomanek argues that English is often spoken at workplaces in Nairobi, while Swahili is a language of instruction (Thomanek 1996: 125). Budohoska’s study outlines in a detailed way, that most people do not speak a “standard” version of the English but mix a lot of Swahili in and develop a kind of “new” English, a Kenyan English (Budohoska 2014).

Regardless of the ‘purity’ of a standard version of a language, these languages can also be defined by the speech community that agrees “by consensus on what is and what is not appropriate” for the setting and community (Labov 1972: 120-121). To conclude, a social milieu functioning as a speech community can define their way of speaking English and Swahili as they think is appropriate (cf. Budohoska 2014: 39, Silverstein 1966).

Wairungu writes about English language in Nairobi. According to him some people see English as a language that is used as a way to ‘show off’, to express you ‘know-it-all’ and to be seen as white Englishmen (Wairungu 2014: 249). Thus, as English is a language of prestigious people, some parents are proud to have children who only speak English (Wairungu 2014: 216). Regarding the Young Professionals, Spronk states that many of them are raised speaking only two languages—English and Swahili (Spronk 2012: 12, 67-69). Neubert stresses that Young Professionals mainly speak three languages: English, Swahili and Sheng (Neubert 2019: 176; 377).

Although the literature does not offer a lot of explicit observation on languages, the characteristics of the social milieu suggest that English plays a more important role than vernacular languages and Swahili. The English language is described as well-educated and working in well-paid jobs in an often international contexts (Neubert 2019: 377; Spronk 2012: 64; Neubert and Stoll 2013: 2128, Stoll 2018b: 291-292; Neubert 2019: 176).

Looking at the language choices of Young Professionals in relation to interlocutors and situation (cf. Appendix F), English seems to be the dominant language (cf. fieldnotes 12<sup>th</sup> August 2019). Personal observations during my stay in Nairobi confirmed that Young Professionals do not only choose English frequently, but they are also very fluent in speaking it. Nevertheless, a young woman claimed that even in Nairobi she had not met anyone [who is Kenyan] that only speaks English (Interview No 12 #00:20:59:9#). This implies that other languages are equally important, as can be seen especially well in narratives about market situations, that these other languages play important roles, and that speaking predominantly English can become a challenge:

“Open air markets; when I need them to reduce the price for shoes. But now the problem is the English words keep coming out. That is what I, I need to keep quiet. But the time I speak Kiswahili seriously is when I go to buy vegetables: tomatoes, onions and all those things, like mama mbogas. Eehm when I come to restaurants like this. Like when I wasn’t to deal with, I would speak some Kiswahili because I know of broken English. To I am likely to ask "ah kuna nini?"” (Interview No 34 #00:33:16-3#).

The young lady expresses that products get more expensive if she talks English, as English is seen as a ‘posh’ language and the language of rich people (cf. Interview No 12 #00:20:59:9#). While in the past English was the language of educated people, it seems as it is increasingly developing to a language for everyday (Interview No 14 #00:05:45-6#, #00:10:59-4#). This is also reflected in the way Young Professionals picture themselves bringing up children (fieldnotes 18<sup>th</sup> June 2019). Nevertheless, Young Professionals are aware that speaking English does not necessarily mean the other person is smart as an interviewee explains:

“Anyone can speak English. It doesn't necessarily mean you are you are smart eehm and there are so many people who are prestige. So, I have seen people who are millionaires. So, I met an agent once, last year. He sells lands, mostly in Karen and you know how Karen is, this guy doesn't know a word in English or Swahili and he is a very, very good businessman, he makes like millions.” (Interview No 49 #00:37:51-9#)

Thus, there are also people working in international contexts and have successful businesses (the same as Young Professionals) who do not speak English at all. Good competence of English language and being able to express oneself is, however, still seen by Young Professionals as a door to professional success (cf. Interview No 50 #00:17:39-8#). One Young Professional emphasizes that in contrast to her recently married husband, who loves Swahili, she is not proud of that language. She rather loves English as she feels this language has more opportunities. As an example, she illuminates how English shapes the impression of a job interview and thus this language is a language of power for her.

“It is English, it is the communication. It is just how you are bringing out the point. So that is how I feel, it is superior in that way, if you look at the opportunities it opens, when you look at the opportunities English is opening and all that, I feel like it is superior in that way. There are lots more opportunities there for people who speak that language and are opposed to speak in English, you got the accent, if I may put it like that, more opportunities, like it is so easy for them to just get jobs, people actually treat them like superior. Yeah. Maybe the colonizers, maybe even all the people who are requiring are all colonize their mind and feel like the white man is superior. That is why it is.” (Interview No 50 #00:17:39-8#).

In contrast to English, where everyone agrees that its mastery is necessary to be professional, it is striking that most Young Professionals emphasize Swahili as an important language, especially in everyday interactions. It is striking because my observations showed that many Young Professionals only have limited competence in Swahili. Besides my own observations that many Young Professionals have trouble to understand or even use numbers and weekdays in Swahili (cf. fieldnotes 10<sup>th</sup> June 2019), they label Swahili as an equalizer and the language to choose— “use Swahili and you are saved (...) everyone uses Swahili” (Interview No 14 #00:09:47-3#). During a day in an office, I observed that greetings are usually exchanged in

Swahili. However, English words are mixed easily into the conversation: “umetuma mails?”<sup>56</sup> and whenever it gets to a deeper level or explanation, the conversations switches to English (cf. fieldnotes 12<sup>th</sup> August 2019).

In order to explain the gap between the statements that expressed that the Young Professionals use Swahili often, and the fact that I barely heard anyone of them speaking Swahili fluently or at all, one interviewee explained that different kinds of Swahili exist. For her “Swahili sanifu”—the grammatically correct Swahili—would be “too much”. She never counted herself as one who speaks “Swahili sanifu” (Interview No 41 #00:12:21-0#). Instead she considers herself as using “flat Swahili” (Interview No 41 #00:25:42-0#). A version that differs from Sheng and that differs from “Swahili ya mtaa” (Interview No 41 #00:09:20-9#). Also, other participants did not use the label “flat Swahili”, they probably had a similar picture—using Swahili phrases for oral small-talk especially to house girls and on the market. Meanwhile they are challenged to speak Swahili fluently.

“I heard never anyone saying a full sentence just in Swahili in my social circle. Yeah.” (Interview No 49 #00:06:43-9#).

Lastly, despite Spronk’s statement that Young Professionals do not aim to have a British or American English accent (Spronk 2012: 68), this does not appear to be the case. While some business ladies long for a British English accent, this aspiration for accents is also reflected in the up-coming generation of Young Professionals such as university students.<sup>57</sup>

Now the question arises why Young Professionals have such a strong connection to English in general. First of all, this might be biased by the interview situation and their feeling to do me a favor by emphasizing this European language. Because my observations support their perception that English is easier for them to speak than Swahili, it is more likely that English’s use as the dominant language is already culturally established for the milieu of Young Professionals. Thus, English seems to function as a distinguish marker between the Young Professionals and other social groups. Thus, Young Professionals use English to distance themselves from other social milieus, and meanwhile, speaking this language creates a circle of belonging. Obviously other reasons such as media and language policies also impact this situation. To conclude, English is very important in their self-presentation—both in a direct

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<sup>56</sup> “Did you send the mails?” (translation by author).

<sup>57</sup> Particularly, at the US-American oriented USIU students with a well-set financial background imitate American English accents from a very early stage on. Although they themselves do not (yet) belong to the Young Professional milieu it is very likely that they end up here, as well as their parents have been members of this milieu too.

way (by speaking English) as well as in an indirect way (by emphasizing English in their reflection of language usage).

#### **5.1.4 Re-discovering Vernacular Languages?**

In the 1970s Parkin wrote that vernacular languages still play an important role in urban Kenya and argues that there are even single ethnicity neighborhoods in Nairobi. Although vernacular languages imply a “low or ordinary status” of the speaker, the vernacular languages have a high importance in interethnic discussions (Parkin 1974c: 196; 211). Despite the apparent importance of vernacular languages, most of the Young Professionals are unable to speak any vernacular language (Spronk 2012: 276; cf. Neubert 2019: 253). Neubert expresses, that vernacular languages lose their importance for Young Professionals: “most Young Professionals were born in Nairobi and have at best only loose relations with their rural kin” (Neubert 2019: 176). Thus, ethnic languages become less important in the city, but function as lingua franca in rural areas.

Despite the general tendency against vernacular language competence, Spronk reports that in one case a Kikuyu lady was interested in vernacular languages and her identity as a Kikuyu—she started to learn the language of her ancestors at a language school (Spronk 2012: 68). Besides the two categories of Young Professionals speaking vernacular languages and those not speaking it, Spronk adds a third sub-group of those who use some phrases in vernacular languages “to poke fun at a particular ethnic group” (Spronk 2012: 69). Although this group speaks and understands a few phrases, they would not consider themselves fluent speakers of this vernacular language.

During my field work with Young Professionals, it was striking to see vernacular languages reported as languages spoken in Nairobi, but rarely by Young Professionals. While other members of other social milieus claim to speak vernacular languages in markets, only one person within the sample of Young Professionals actually did so. Others would use Swahili, Sheng or even English. Another occasion to speak vernacular languages is with grandparents—as Young Professionals often do not speak English and Swahili, and it would be the only way to communicate. Interestingly, only one participant mentioned that he would also use vernacular languages in communication with siblings, while others would rather use English and Swahili. In addition, this person is the only one who decided to learn his vernacular language, Kikuyu, as an adult. Although this finding may be a coincident, it appears to confirm

the Spronk's observation that Kikuyu people are especially eager to learn their vernacular language.

This interviewee claims that he was not only interested in learning Kikuyu for his self-identification and to be able to communicate with his family, but also sees it as essential for his business. Working as a banker with several 'side hustles,' he believes that Kikuyu people are good business-people and that capacity to speak to them directly with Kikuyu language will support his business (cf. Interview No 14 #00:12:14-9#):

“If you don't belong to a particular sphere you could just, you could get, you will be sure that it—that is why I also had to go to class to know it, because Kikuyu—like I told you—is the language for business. You, you will—it is just part of belonging somewhere—languages are there.” (Interview No 14 #00:34:53-5#)

A young woman running a start-up for sustainable agriculture, confirmed that vernacular languages are a plus in business. She admits that she gives huge discounts for people from her ethnicity<sup>58</sup>:

“Aaah okay now, see like my machines are 120 000, if I find out you are my tribe mate, I might consider 100 000.KES. I don't know what really happens with mentality, or I have never understood by the way, (@) (...) I do, so I give them a discount because kikuyu are very good when it comes to business. So, you have to, you have to, but I also give my customers discount not just my tribe mates actually, but it depends, my tribe mate gets more discount than others. yeah. and again, not only tribe not just tribe. If I know you, you know this and this you get a good discount.” (Interview No 41 #00:06:33-6#)

Although discounts are also granted to friends, ethnicity and language play a major role in businesses for Young Professionals, as my research results show.

While some of the Young Professionals claim to speak vernacular languages—or even more than one—it seems that mostly they speak or understand phrases. These skills might be valuable in situations such as at the market place, but most of the Young Professionals will probably not understand a whole conversation in these languages (fieldnotes 10<sup>th</sup> June 2019). In fact, some said, that they do not speak these vernacular languages, but stated that they hear and understand them. Having a passive knowledge of the vernacular languages might be more realistic depiction for most Young Professionals.

Despite the fact that vernacular languages might be an asset for business, international languages are valued more. Thus, some Young Professionals speak another international language such as German or Spanish besides English. Especially among the up-coming

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<sup>58</sup> However, it remained unclear if she must give this discount or she wants to give them a discount.

generation, international language skills are highly valued and noticeable.<sup>59</sup> One observes that the motivation to learn an international language is higher than to learn local ones. This is also reflected in the way Young Professionals picture themselves raising their own children. While some argue that it is important for the children to know their origins and speak vernacular languages, most emphasize that English is even more important and they would do everything for a good English education of their child.

In conclusion, Young Professionals mostly value vernacular languages as an asset in business and take this as the reason for learning it. This goal conforms to our understanding of Young Professionals as career-oriented. Additionally, this business focus might also explain why they tend to overestimate their language competences and claim to speak a vernacular, despite my observations that show they know only some of its phrases. Lastly, it is interesting to see the identical goals for learning vernacular or international languages—both have the purpose of strengthening their career, their status, and to ensure a prosperous future.

## **5.2 Social Climbers**

### **5.2.1 Characteristics of Social Climbers**

The milieu of the Social Climbers includes people who are mostly in their twenties to forties, grew up in the countryside and moved to Nairobi for work (Stoll 2017a: 49). As many members of this milieu are married, the nuclear family is very important to them. The importance of the nuclear family distinguishes this milieu from others (Stoll 2017a: 45-49; Stoll 2018b: 285; Neubert 2019: 375). In contrast, ties to the extended family are loose. Among other reasons, this roots in the fact that the Social Climbers would not be able to maintain their standard of living within this extended network of mutual solidarity.

The income of Social Climbers is usually below the average income of the middle class in Nairobi, which places them at the lower end of middle class people and leads to an unstable living situation (Neubert 2019: 375). Therefore, members of this milieu often have extended working hours and different sources of income at the same time. A high percentage of this income is saved which will improve the living situation in a long-term perspective. For instance, Social Climbers aim to invest into business, additional qualifications or good education for their children (Stoll 2017a: 49; Stoll 2018b: 285). Consequently, saving plays a special role for Social Climbers as they pay more attention to saving than other milieus (Stoll

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<sup>59</sup> Despite the stereotype of speaking many international languages, there are also some students who get interested in their vernacular languages. However, mostly the ones who are interested in vernacular languages do not fit into the milieu of Young Professionals.



2016: 203-204). Hence, they limit their expenses to a minimum, and would rather buy secondhand clothes and avoid spending money on consumer goods such as expensive phones and TVs (Neubert 2019: 376-377).

Usually, Social Climbers have a good secondary education without a university degree (Neubert 2019: 375).<sup>60</sup> Some work as taxi-drivers others have a workshop or work to be able to open their own business (Stoll 2017a: 49). Often, they have midterm and long-term strategies to achieve these plans (Stoll 2017a: 49).

Most Social Climbers are not political. They see their role models in successful business people. Additionally, they find it more attractive to open their own business than finding a formal employment (Neubert 2019: 376). Socio-economic advancement and wealth are the most important values for them. Accordingly, they would also take well-calculated risks into account to ensure these goals (Neubert 2019: 376).

In general, this milieu shows many parallels to the Christian Milieu as they are ambitious to advancement in their jobs, are often religious and entangled within their ethnic group, but only Social Climbers show such high saving rates and taking long working hours into consideration (Stoll 2016: 204).

In my research, I clustered seven people as Social Climbers.<sup>61</sup> Three of them were born in Nairobi and four moved to Nairobi between six month and ten years ago. I interviewed three males and four females. Most of them work as freelancers in different sectors such as an insurance, fitness, hospitality, care work, and transportation and following several small jobs in the networking sector.

Of the group of interviewees three are married. While one of them has several children, two others are married without children. In addition, the sample includes four unmarried interviewees. One of the unmarried ones is a single mother who raises her daughter alone. Among the other three unmarried interviewees one has a boyfriend. Their age ranges from 21 to 43 years. All of them identify themselves as Christians belonging to different denominations such as Baptist and Pentecostal. One left school after form Four, the others gained a diploma and even a Bachelor's degree.

The three who were born in Nairobi all grew up in Eastlands. Two recently moved to Kilimani. It should be noted however that their standard of living is probably co-financed by their

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<sup>60</sup> However, some got a tertiary education often funded by members of the extended family or by scholarships (cf. Neubert 2019: 375).

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Appendix E Social Climbers—Demographic Data.

husbands.<sup>62</sup> Although they ‘crossed the line’ they feel closely connected to their childhood neighborhood.

Regarding the character, the singles seem to save a lot of money and aim for a better future (cf. Stoll 2016). The interviewees who have already children emphasized their wish that their children will gain access to a good education and thus have a better future. This is also expressed in their ambition to speak English to their children, even though they themselves have struggles speaking it.

Interviewee	Languages Interviewee speak <sup>63</sup>	Languages in Nairobi
No 2	Eng Swa V	Swa Eng V
No 3	Swa Eng V Int	Swa Eng Sh
No 13	V Swa Eng	V Swa
No 42	Sh Eng	Eng Swa Sh V
No 53	/	/
No 54	/	/
No 61	V Eng	/

Figure 4: Accounts of Language Choice by Social Climbers (by author).

Among the languages the Social Climbers speak, the interviewed people of this social milieu responded to speak English, Swahili, and vernacular languages (cf. figure 4). One replied to speak an international language meaning to speak some German words which were caught up from customers. Interestingly, two of the five who answered this question did not mention Swahili among the languages they speak. However, coming to the languages, they regularly hear in Nairobi everyone mentioned Swahili and English as well as partly vernacular languages and Sheng. Thereby vernacular languages seem to be more common than Sheng.

In regards to their interlocutors a huge gap can be observed between those who grew up in Nairobi and those who were born at the countryside. While vernacular languages are the language of choice that nearly all of the interviewees who were born at the countryside use to approach grandparents, parents and even siblings, for the ones born in Nairobi, Swahili is more prominent to address older family members than vernacular languages. The interviewees who grew up in Nairobi addressed their siblings mainly in Sheng, but used Swahili and English to address their partners and spouses. To address their friends this group states to use a variety of

<sup>62</sup> In this characteristic they differ from Neubert’s and Stoll’s analysis. As the other characteristics still fit, I group them into the milieu of the Social Climbers as it is best fitting. They might not represent the ideal type but still share lifestyles and norms with other members. Additionally, it should be mentioned that their husbands (who have not been interviewed) belong to another milieu as one studied in the USA at a highly valued university and the other one has German nationality.

<sup>63</sup> Eng= English; Swa=Swahili; V=vernacular languages; Int=international languages; Sh=Sheng.

languages such as Swahili, Sheng, English and vernaculars. In official situations English and Swahili are chosen. Thereby, English is more dominant in situations with government officials than medical situations such as going to the doctor's. In unofficial situations such as the market place, Sheng and Swahili dominate the field.

While many people in Nairobi stated that they only pray in English without exception, members of the Social Climbers milieu also mentioned Swahili and partly vernacular languages as the language to express their personal prayers.

Regarding feelings and moods two of them gained clear answers: Members of this milieu think that both, professionalism as well as being romantic, is best articulated in English. In contrast, being cool is either English or Sheng or a mix of both. The same is true for expressing happiness which is mostly done in Swahili and Sheng. Jokes by Social Climbers are mostly made in Swahili or Sheng whereas English and Swahili are the languages of choice to appear serious. Sadness, however, is either pictured in a variety of mixing different languages or best expressed in English.

### **5.2.2 Performing Englishness**

As outlined before, the English language plays a special role in Kenya. On the one side it is an international language that is used worldwide in business—including the globally well-connected city, Nairobi. On the other hand, English is the language of the former colonialists. Although most interviewees do not see English as a colonial language anymore, for some the connection remains. For instance, one young lady criticizes the use of English and feels that she and her fellow Kenyans are even colonizing themselves by reproducing the dominant usage of English. As an example, she refers to job descriptions and interviews where proper English is a must (cf. Interview No 3 #00:30:39-7#).

High and low versions of a language can establish a hierarchy within one language (cf. Errington 2001:29). In addition to that, also different languages can be characterized in a hierarchic way in regards to prestige, officialness and informality (cf. Fishman 1967; Gal 1979). Thereby, Fishman defines high languages as those, that are utilized within religion, education and other aspects of high culture and the low languages that are connotated for everyday life at home and work, rather informal settings (Fishman 1967: 30).

As elaborated earlier, if people are able to choose between different languages (in addition to styles and codes as variations within a language) one talks also about choosing between language registers. Thereby, “people ‘enregister’ specific bits of language and other semiotic

material, configured, indexically ordered, so as to produce specific meanings" (Blommaert 2014: 110). Thus, the language as such becomes a symbolic meaning and transmits information in addition to the direct communicated information. The speaker can choose among his arsenal in accordance with the meanings s/he wishes to communicate (Gumperz 1964: 138 in Bush 2012:2, cf. Searle 1965: 7). In order to be able to switch between different registers "communicative competence" is required (Blommaert 2014: 110) as well as the ability to have a certain level of language competence.

Switching between these registers can be seen as a sort of performance. The term *linguistic performance* is coined by Chomsky (1965), Austin (1975) and Searle (1965) as well as Hymes (1972). *Linguistic performance* "is most explicit understood as concerned with the processes often termed encoding and decoding" (Hymes 1972: 55). Thereby *linguistic performance* shows many parallels to the Cultural Sociological theory of performances (cf. Alexander 2004). Besides the speaker, his/her audience, and the sociocultural content, it implies "the actual use of a language within a concrete situation" (Hymes 1972: 55). Blom and Gumperz add that speech performances "are independent of expressed attitudes and similar in nature to the grammatical rules operating on the level of intelligibility" (Blom and Gumperz 1972: 432). Consequently, analyzing languages from a sociocultural perspective does not singularly look at linguistic pattern within a language, but aims to be intelligible and thereby express a specific meaning. Searle even sees linguistic and speech performances woven into another. Performing a speech act is a token which would be produced and then "constitutes the basic unit of linguistic communication" (Searle 1965: 2). Thus, this can also be read as a plea for combining micro and macro research.

In her study on language choice among youth in Mongolia, Dovchin comes to the conclusion that different varieties of languages are used not because of who the speaker is, but rather of what the speaker wants to be like, what he performs by choosing a particular language (Dovchin 2011: 527). Judith Butler frames this as

"it is not so much whether or not one is born in a particular type of community but rather what one does with the language"" (Butler 2003: 527 in Dovchin 2011: 320).

Thus, Butler and Dovchin observe how language choice—especially the choice of English—is used to display identity and how individuals perform identity through language. Language thereby has a special role, as it is the medium through which prior and re-defined identities are negotiated and created (Dovchin 2011: 320). English, in particular, serves as a link to place one's local identity in connection with a global one (Dovchin 2011: 326). English as a global

language (and being the language of the former colonialists) inherits not only in Kenya a special aspect of power which shapes everyday talks (cf. Gal 1987: 637).

Although numerous publications worked on English in Kenya (cf. Budohoska 2014; Githiora 2018b among others), Neubert and Stoll did not publish any detailed results about English language use among Social climbers. Based on the characteristics of this social milieu (as upcoming business (wo-)men who mostly had a good secondary education and partly hold university degrees), one can conclude that they do speak English to a very fluent extent (cf. Neubert 2019: 375). Social Climbers are known for being focused on their nuclear families and were often born outside Nairobi. These characteristics suggests that they do also speak Swahili and probably at least one vernacular language fluently.

Returning to my own data and the insights gained during the field research, the data shows that many Social Climbers have a dichotomous view on using the English language. On the one side, most of them emphasize English as an important language<sup>64</sup>—especially in the city. And on the other side, many Social Climbers admit that English is not their preferred language but they feel, that they “have to” speak it.

Several times interviewees emphasized the impressions people get when one speaks English:

“When you talk English people will think that you are more educated, they take you to another standard”  
(Interview No 3 #00:08:49#).

Thus, speaking English is connected to education, higher social class, and a better standard of living. Interestingly, this seems to be detached from other aspects of life such as clothing, job, or social background. By speaking English, the interlocutor seems to group him-/herself into another category.

Although, the interviewees aim to be seen as educated, classy and fancy (cf. Interview No 3 #00:03:18-6#; #00:26:55-3#), there is also an aspect of pressure and social norms that force them to use English language:

“For me to speak English, [...] It must, it MUST be formal or maybe I am missing a Swahili word that I should be knowing but I can’t remember it but I know it in English, [...] This is when I speak English, or maybe when I want to look high-class. Yes- I forgot that. Where you want to pretend you are someone you are not. You know? Like you are in a crowd and you don’t wanna hang out with them I don’t know, some people because, you know, they are gonna push you down there, you know? So, you are like “speak English” and they are like “eeeh she is not one of us” because I did it on purpose so you may see that you know, yeah. Stuff like that. (...) giving you an example of another situation, you remember when I

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<sup>64</sup> However, differences in the attitudes towards English can be seen between those who were born in Nairobi and those who moved to Nairobi later after growing up at the countryside (c.f. chapter 5.2.4).

told you that I spoke English intentionally to look high-class? I, I used to do modelling, so when I won the Miss award, I know! Yeah so I:: I had to speak English, like I really had to force myself to speak nice English, because I was not the only winner, [...] and everyone had to, to, to say a speech, you know? You don't wanna shame yourself. (...) [...] I think you don't have a choice. you know? Yeah, yeah, everyone has a choice, this is what people say, but eehm when you, when you are in an official place, you have to feel comfortable speaking English. You don't have a choice because normally, you want to be respected. English is going for respect, not so many things. See we do English when we need to. [...]" (Interview No 3 #00:28:32-5#).

Beside the aspect of wanting to be seen highly educated and classy, this statement illuminates the social pressure to speak English in formal situations and certain settings to prevent language mistakes and “fit” to the situation. Although there seems to be a choice, this interviewee stresses that she does not feel like having a choice but is forced to speak English. Other situations even let her “pretend” to be someone by speaking English, to be a better fit. Since school, this young lady feels like “perform” in English (Interview No 3 #00:13:18-6#), as it is socially expected and demanded.

Other Social Climbers add that their work forces them to speak English as this is the language their clients understand best, although they themselves seem to have trouble speaking English fluently for a longer discussion (cf. Interview No 42 #00:01:09-5#). Here English can be seen as the professional language—and in addition a performance to fit into the job, English is used to fit into the societal expectations. The argument of “fitting into the job” became visible for me, during a hiking trip organized by a group of Social Climbers. Although the young guy stated that he is not fluent in English, he tried hard to make all announcements in English as this is “appropriate” in his situation as the fitness trainer (fieldnote 15<sup>th</sup> June 2019).

Another young lady agrees that speaking English in certain settings goes along with pretending to be someone through performing. In her opinion this has been part of their life since childhood and is part of the education by parents and in school:

“I mean, we were brought up humble, being somebody. So, if you go somewhere you wanna be yourself, but you, you they force you to be someone you are not. So, you have to act a certain way, oh God it sucks. Like I am comfortable to hang out with you know locals(...) this is where I belong. Not where I belong but where I feel comfortable. Take me to capital club, I feel like this is not me. I am pretending to be here. I mean this is just not me but I have to be there for a couple of hours then you leave.” (Interview No 53 #00:23:48-8#)

This young lady is married to a Kenyan man who studies abroad, and describes that she often feels like she is not being herself. This is for instance expressed by her husband reprimanding her for her Kenyan English as he would love her to have an American accent. Meanwhile she is proud being Kenyan including having a Kenyan accent (Interview No 53 #00:28:25-3#).

This implies that her acting and “improving” her language skills is demanded even within the nuclear family in order to feel like she is fitting in (Interview No 53 and 54 #00:22:41-3#).

While most of the interviews Social Climbers in my sample admit to perform their Englishness, only one person did not feel like pretending as for him it did not matter to switch between English and Swahili (Interview No 61 #00:10:29-6#).

The most interesting aspect of this phenomena is that most Social Climbers ignored their hassles with speaking English, but kept going as they felt it is appropriate. For them leaving their lower-class past behind goes along with speaking English and thereby constituting their ‘new’ identity. Thus, one can say speaking English expresses the performance of the social climbing for them.

### **5.2.3 Swahili and Vernacular Languages—Home to the Social Climbers?**

Both, Stoll as well as Neubert mention that the nuclear family is very important to Social Climbers. While most of them grew up at the countryside, improving the current situation for their family and focusing on personal achievement to ensure a better future for the nuclear family are among their main goals (Stoll 2017a: 45-49; Stoll 2018b: 285-287; Neubert 2019: 375, 385).

Different research shows that especially in the countryside—where many Social Climbers grew up—vernacular languages and Swahili have a high importance. Neubert outlines that many Social Climbers “still speak their mother tongue” (Neubert 2019: 252).

Mother tongues or vernacular languages play a major role for personalities and individual identity (cf. Abdulaziz and Osinde 1997: 43). Meanwhile Swahili exists for interethnic communication and is often associated to urban life and specific occupations especially in the administrative sector (Githiora 2002: 161-163). Besides a standard Swahili which is taught in school, different variations exist (Githiora 2002: 163).

In general, Social Climbers seem to have a positive attitude towards Swahili and are quite fluent in it (cf. Interview No 3 #00:54:22-7#). However, numerous kinds of Swahili have to be differentiated:

“Kwa Kiswahili kuna two, kuna hisia yake peke yake. Kwa sababu Kiswahili pia ina ina iko unique. Hata ukijipata unaongea Kiswahili sanifu, kunai le diction unatumia. So inakaa smart. Ni nzuri na inapendeza. Hio yaani kiswahili kiko sawa. Kiko nzuri. (...) aah kile Kiswahil chetu cha kawaida—Sheng. Kiswahili. Kiswahili sanifu ni vigumu sana kupata watu wanaokizunguma. Labda, labda ukienda

coastal region unapatanga Kiswahili sasa iko nzuri, watu wanaozungumza Kiswahili sanifu (Interview No 42 #00:05:33-7#).<sup>65</sup>

At least two different versions of Swahili exist: Standard Swahili, which is hard to learn (and nearly no one speaks it fluently) as well as “our Swahili”—an everyday version of Swahili that includes mixing languages similar to Sheng and that is the one most Social Climbers speak. The quote above also expresses another phenomenon which the speaker himself is aware of and describes as: he cannot speak more than twenty words without mixing an English word in between (cf. fieldnotes 15<sup>th</sup> September 2019).

Similarly, fluency in vernacular languages was also questioned by some of the speakers (Interview No 42 #00:02:30-9#). While at first the interviewees mentioned that they speak it, throughout the interview it became obvious that they do not speak it actively rather they can understand it if others around them speak in that language (cf. Interview No 53 #00:02:25-9#). Most of them do not speak their vernacular language among friends and nuclear family within Nairobi, but feel a need to speak this language when they are in the rural areas (Interview No 42 #00:11:02-5#; Interview No 53 #00:05:55-2#).

Although the nuclear family is highly valued, and most of the Social Climbers grew up on the countryside and feel a need for these languages while being there, the desire to learn vernacular languages is limited:

“No, mmh is it a desire. No it is not, but the family forces you to want to learn it, because they ask you why like ask you why don’t you want to learn Kikuyu, this is your mother tongue, so you, there is pressure to learn it, so there is no desire but pressure.” (Interview No 53 #00:02:59-6#).

Those who claim to be able to speak one or more vernacular languages are mostly those who were born upcountry. While the Young Professionals state that they barely ever speak vernacular languages within their nuclear family or within informal settings, Social Climbers claim to speak vernacular languages more frequently. Thus, all said to either speak vernacular languages or Swahili to their grandparents and only one person mentioned to once in a while speak English to her parents, while all others use vernacular, Sheng and Swahili in conversations with parents, siblings and spouses. The two who every now and then use English in conversations with parents or with their spouses are those who ‘married upwards’, thus have

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<sup>65</sup> Translation by author: For Swahili, we have two they have their own feelings. Because Swahili is unique. Even if you find yourself speaking standard Swahili, you use a diction. So, it looks smart. It is good and it looks good. To say, the Swahili is okay. It is good. It is nice. (...) aah the other Swahili is our normal Swahili—Sheng. Swahili. For standard Swahili is very difficult to find anyone speaking it. Maybe, maybe if you go to the coastal region, you will find Swahili that is good, people who speak standard Swahili (Interview No 42 #00:05:33-7#).



a husband from abroad or one who studies abroad.<sup>66</sup> For all others vernacular languages and Swahili are the mainly used languages. These languages are also used to express emotions such as happiness and for joking. Whereas joking is mainly in Swahili and Sheng, happiness can also be expressed in vernacular languages.

In conclusion, Social Climbers have a more differentiated view on Swahili than other milieus such as the Young Professionals have. While Young Professionals talked about different versions of Swahili to describe ‘Sheng’, Social Climbers distinguish between different kinds of Swahili as such. Together with vernacular languages these different versions of Swahili seem to be more convenient for Social Climbers. This affinity towards Swahili in combination with their feeling of being forced to speak English thereby to adopt to the situation reflects their lifestyle of going through struggles for a brighter future.

#### **5.2.4 Origin Matters—Urban vs. Rural**

During the time Parkin and Whiteley did their research on language use in Nairobi in the 1960s, it was characteristic for Nairobi’s inhabitants to move to the city for work and return to the rural areas for retirement (De Lame 2010: 153). However, this behavior has changed in recent years—not only for Social Climbers. While Neubert and Stoll argue that most members of the Social Climbers milieu moved to Nairobi, my research also detected some Social Climbers who were born and raised in Nairobi. All of them have in common that they grew up in Eastlands and now have a job “across the line”, which means that they work (and partly live) in the western neighborhoods of Nairobi. Furthermore, they share that their prosperity is related to non-Kenyan input: either school education or university degree from abroad or they are married to a non-Kenyan husband.<sup>67</sup> Additionally, the ones who moved to Nairobi for educational purposes or for work have been living in Nairobi now for at least five years, with most reporting they have been living in Nairobi for over ten years. Only one person moved to Nairobi recently (half a year ago). Prior to that he stayed in Nairobi’s suburbs and commuted to the center.

Within my data, there is a significant difference between urban and up-country population visible despite the fact that Social Climbers in general speak more vernacular languages than

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<sup>66</sup> As marrying upwards opens up a whole new discussion, it will not be further elaborated here. Instead here it is simply recognized and encourages others to continue research on the effect upwards marriage has on the language choices.

<sup>67</sup> Although it will not be further discussed here, how they achieved the social climbing, it should be mentioned. However, the focus will be on language use regardless how they achieved wealth.

Young Professionals. While most of the Social Climbers born in Nairobi speak only a little vernacular—mostly to their grandparents—the ones who grew up outside Nairobi use vernacular languages more frequently, for example also among their partners, friends, siblings and at the market. Another huge difference that goes along with the prior one, is the usage of English. The ones coming from the countryside tend to use more Swahili than English, while the ones born in the city incorporated English as a main language in their everyday life. This does not mean that they like and identify with this language (cf. chapter 5.2.2). But regardless of the motivation, they use English quite frequently. Mostly this becomes visible while expressing feelings: whereas the rural population expresses feelings rather in Swahili and sometimes in Sheng, the urban population in contrast, expresses anger and sadness in English. In addition, differences of origin also become visible regarding official speech situations: while English dominates for both during interaction with government officials, language choice at the doctor's is less uniform. While most of the ones born in Nairobi would speak English to the doctor, the ones from the countryside would speak Swahili when it comes to express deeper needs (cf. Interview No 2 #00:17:55-1#; Interview No 61 #00:14:08-5#). Thereby, it plays a role if this language is comfortable for the doctor. If not, Social Climbers would stick to English in order to accommodate the doctor best (Interview No 13 #00:12:16-8#). However, it is important to Social Climbers to speak at least one of the official languages, thus both—Sheng and vernaculars—would not work (Interview No 42 #00:13-34-8#).

While some categories and speech situations do not show any differences such as being professional (speaking English) or using Sheng and Swahili at the market, languages spoken to the partner likewise differ in line with origin. Although, all of the Social Climbers agreed that English is the most romantic language, only those who were born in Nairobi and married a husband that lived abroad Kenya for a longer time, use English as the main language within their partnership. However, here again the aspect of aligning oneself shines through as at the same time they mention that English is not their favorite language (cf. chapter 5.2.2).

This internal differentiation within one milieu has not yet been part of the milieu studies by Neubert and Stoll. Thus, looking at microstudies such as language usage and bringing them in relation to socio parameters, one can gain new insights and a deeper understanding. Probably, similar inner milieu differentiations can also be found in other milieus and regarding other parts of lifestyle. An additional example that I have touched upon, are marriages where one partner married upwards and which impacts also the language choices.

Consequently, these differentiations within a milieu soften the static units of milieus and make them fluid and more dynamic. Although the distinct and separated units of milieus make it

easier to group people and to analyze them in the form of ideal types. Future research will likely continue to soften these lines.

### **5.3 The Entanglement of Language Choice and Social Milieus**

#### **5.3.1 Contrasting the Two Case Milieus**

The previous case studies have illustrated how two milieus that resemble in age and class and language repertoire differ in their lifestyles and language choices. In terms of lifestyles, research states that Young Professionals have a hedonistic lifestyle, are often singles or unmarried and work in the business sector or have their own start-up. Social Climbers, meanwhile, are known for growing up at the countryside, working hard and focus on improvement for a better future, especially for the nuclear family. While the literature proposes that Young Professionals speak a lot of Sheng, Swahili and English, they have rather an aversion against Sheng. In contrast, the literature does only rarely characterize the Social Climbers by their language behavior. However, the characteristics of Social climbers allow conclusions on their language choices. So, it seems as this milieu of Social Climbers is rather fluent in vernacular languages, Swahili as well as English and less fluent in Sheng since most grew up in the countryside.

Comparing these results with the new data gained from the field research produced new insights which specify and revise these assumptions. Figures 5 and figure 6 compare literature-based statements on language choices with the data gained through interviews and my observations during the time in the field.

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Young Professionals		
Literature	Interviews	Observations
<p><b>Sheng</b> is one of the main languages for Young Professionals and is spoken proudly – especially among the younger ones (cf. Sponk 2012: 58; Neubert 2019).</p>	<p>Young Professionals distance themselves from Sheng. Although they do not state it among the language they speak, they define Sheng as “corrupt Swahili” and avoid it as they think, they won’t be taken seriously if they use Sheng. Nevertheless, they admit to speak a mixture of Swahili and English at social gatherings and can enjoy this mix as it is “exotic”.</p>	<p>Most of the Young Professionals speak a mixture of English with some few Swahili (or Sheng?) words in informal settings. Those under 30 years speak a language that could be named Sheng. However, often it seemed to be artificial and not their natural way of speaking.</p>
<p><b>Local languages</b> are typically not spoken among Young Professionals, however many can hear it—Gikuyu people mark an exception (cf. Sponk 2012: 12; 67-68; 276).</p>	<p>Many do not speak their vernacular language but claim to be able to have an oral understanding of these languages. Most of them, however, speak at least one international language in addition to English.</p>	<p>Many of them speak greetings and a few phrases in vernacular languages.</p>
<p>Besides Sheng, they speak a lot of <b>English</b> and <b>Swahili</b> (cf. Sponk 2012: 12; Neubert 2019). However, American or British accents are rather seen critical (cf. Sponk 2012: 68).</p>	<p>Young Professionals state that they speak English at work and Swahili during their breaks. English is described as the language of opportunities while Swahili is seen as a language that is hard to learn, so that many “only speak a flat Swahili” (which is not Sheng).  Interestingly, several students (who might later belong to the Young Professional milieu) observed that at university many imitate an American accent on purpose.</p>	<p>Most of them appear more fluent in English than in Swahili. Thus, a lot of English phrases are used while speaking Swahili.</p>

Figure 5: Young Professionals (by author).

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Social Climbers		
Literature	Interviews	Observations
Coming from the countryside suggests that <b>Sheng</b> is not among the language repertoire of Social Climbers (cf. Stoll 2017: 49).	Speaking Sheng is avoided, as doing so is associated with being illiterate and poor. However, speaking it in the ‘right’ circles is enjoyed by Social Climbers.	Listening to Social Climbers interacting, it seems like they switch often between languages. One could therefore call their language “Sheng”, but no one admitted to being fluent in Sheng.
Social Climbers have strong connections to their rural homes and thus still use their <b>vernacular language</b> (cf. Neubert 2019: 376).	Social Climbers state that they speak vernacular languages especially up-country. They do not show a desire to develop advanced proficiency in vernacular languages.	Many Social Climbers show a relatively high fluency in vernacular languages, although they do not emphasize these skills.
As they are often born in the countryside, their <b>English</b> competence might be less fluent in comparison to <b>Swahili</b> (cf. Neubert 2019).	Some feel like they have to “perform” speaking English to look “high-class”, to seem educated and to promote themselves. In contrast, many enjoy speaking Swahili—not “Swahili sanifu” —but a mixed version (not Sheng). Differences can be noted between Social Climbers who were born up-country and those who grew up in Nairobi.	Speaking English is challenging for Social Climbers, who often search for words and use a relatively limited vocabulary while speaking. Additionally, many have a strong Kenyan accent.

Figure 6: Social climbers (by author).

These two tables (figure 5 and figure 6) show differences between the literature-based pre-assumptions and the actual self-portrait on how languages are chosen and used. The differences include several levels of analysis—whereby three main observations can be distinguished: deviation from pre-assumption (1), concretize pre-assumption (2), and new finds in addition to existing pre-assumptions (3).

### 1) *Deviation from Pre-assumptions*

So far, Spronk (2012) as well as Neubert and Stoll (2015) supposed that Young Professionals speak Sheng as one of their main languages of communication besides English and Swahili. My research, however, showed that most Young Professionals do not label their own language choices as Sheng. While they admit that they speak a mix of Swahili and English that might

have been declared as Sheng by researchers, they themselves do not regard this language as Sheng. For them, Sheng is associated with poor education and lower social class. Young Professionals and researchers may be describing the same phenomenon of mixing languages, but the labeling seems to make enormous difference for the Young Professionals and their self-presentation.

Secondly, description of the Social Climbers milieu suggests that they do not speak Sheng as they did not grow up in the city. However, there are Social Climbers who were born in Nairobi, and these individuals speak Sheng. In line with Young Professionals, Social Climbers describe Sheng as a language of illiterate people and try to distance themselves from this language in official situations. In informal settings such as social gatherings, however, they enjoy taking Sheng.

Lastly, Neubert and Stoll as well as Spronk assume that most Young Professionals do not speak their vernacular language. Gikuyu people are named as an exception. Although my research came to similar conclusions, including the willingness to participate in fee-based language courses for vernacular languages. It is not clear that many Young Professionals have passive language competences in vernaculars. Thus, even though they might not speak a vernacular language fluently, they often claimed to be able to hear (and understand) this language (having passive language competences). In addition, Young Professionals have a high frequency of international language competences in contrast to members of other social milieus.

## 2) *Concretize Pre-assumption*

The main internal differentiation can be seen by observing the origin of Social Climbers and the impact it has on their language repertoire. So far, scholars have assumed that Social Climbers moved from the countryside to Nairobi. My research data, however, also suggests, that there is a second group of Social Climbers who were born and raised in Nairobi and had economic success. This ascension is also reflected in their lifestyles that resembles those of rural-born Kenyans. In contrast, the similar lifestyle, language choice patterns and the repertoire differ between these two groups. The countryside group shows higher competences in vernacular languages while the urban group shows a higher fluency in English language. Furthermore, these differences are also reflected in the languages chosen for emotional expression as opposed to communication (especially with family members or officials) (cf. chapter 5.2.4).

Secondly, literature does not explicitly differentiate between English and Swahili language usage among Young Professionals. In my research, however, differences became visible:

Young Professionals use English more often than Swahili in their everyday life. This is demonstrated in their self-accounts of their language choices, but more importantly in their higher language competence in English compared to Swahili. Thus, although Young Professionals emphasize their Swahili usage, their language fluency demonstrates that English is more frequently used than Swahili.

### 3) *New findings*

In addition to verifying previous observations in the literature, my research also identified new findings

Firstly, speaking English does not seem as natural as for Young Professionals as it is for Social Climbers. While for Young Professionals it appears to be the easiest to express themselves in English, many of the Social Climbers claim to have a feeling of “pretending” and “performing” while speaking English. As many Social Climbers struggled hard to get where they are, this position might still be unfamiliar for them. In contrast, for many Social Climbers, expressing themselves in Swahili seems to be more comforting. For instance, during the interviews conducted in English Social Climbers tend to mix in more Swahili words than Young Professionals. In addition, the fluency with which they spoke English varied. The importance of Swahili for Social Climbers can also be seen in language choice patterns in conversations with family members and expressing emotions. Social Climbers often choose Swahili to express feelings and have deeper discussions. To conclude, the aspect of performing and pretending to be someone, fits well into the characterization of the Social Climber milieu, and is not captured yet in the literature, although it probably appears in more aspects of life also beyond language choices.

Secondly, although Social Climbers seem to enjoy speaking Swahili, most of them emphasize that their Swahili is not ‘Swahili sanifu’, the standard Swahili, but a flatter version. While they argue that ‘Swahili sanifu’ is very hard to learn (and seems as least as difficult as English), they enjoy the flatter version and use it as their main language within town.

After the summary of the results on an empirical level and an examination of how the study of self-accounts of language choices enriches the existing studies on social milieus, the next two chapters discuss the mutually enrichment of meso- and micro-level within the research. First, I look at the impact of social belonging on language choices and then, secondly, how the language choices impact the social belonging.

### 5.3.2 The Impact of Social Belonging on Language Choices

This study shows that differences among the milieus are also reflected within their attitudes and self-accounts of language choices. This section focusses on how the mesolevel influences the microlevel; characteristics from the mesolevel are also found within the microlevel analysis of language. The language a person speaks is thus influenced by the personal environment and biography, by his or her surrounding (cf. Busch 2012; Blommaert 2014: 110). The environment of a person impacts the languages a person acquires and can also shape the attitudes a person has towards certain languages.

Language repertoires vary among people and are shaped by ideologies and power relations (cf. Storch 2013: 178; chapter 3.4). These ideologies and power relations are often implicitly and partly explicitly taught by parents, family members and the close society around a speaker. Looking at the social milieus, particularly on Social Climbers and Young Professionals, attitudes and world views are reflected in the languages spoken at home and the ones the children are encouraged to learn. For instance, the hedonistic lifestyle of Young Professionals is expressed by teaching children primarily English. English, a language that is regarded to be classy, is to provide access to success and higher education, and is seen as a worldwide language. In contrast, children of Social Climbers are often raised being fluent in Swahili as well as English and partly also their vernacular language. This can be interpreted as passing on a family-centered lifestyle. The parents who often struggle themselves with English, but exert themselves to enable their children to speak fluent English, mirrors the efforts of Social Climbers to ensure a better future. A better future is thereby connected to English, the language of opportunities and success.

Regarding this phenomenon on a metalevel, one can easily identify how the mesolevel of lifestyle characteristics of different social milieus can be seen on the microlevel. Language choice as a case in point for microlevel analysis shows that within the language repertoires and the language choice, behavior of certain milieus is passed on. Languages are acquired together with its system of context specific usage and ways of speaking (Storch 2013: 84). This way of speaking that also includes choices of style, register or even staying silent, is part of a symbolic practice of a speaker within his/her community (Storch 2013: 84).

The society or community impacting or ‘doing’ the language choice, is reminiscent of the concept “Doing Gender” by West and Zimmermann (1987). In their famous article, they develop the hypothesis that gender is a social construction. This social construct does not exist naturally, but exists by doing it (West and Zimmermann 1987). Consequently, the categories of gender are not there per se, but emerge through its performance in everyday interactions and



is passed on within specific social groups. A parallel line of argumentation arises around languages as well as social milieus. Both of the categories do not exist naturally, but like gender they emerge through the doing, the performance<sup>68</sup>. Similarly, these categories can be modified by individuals through their interactions. While these interactions and behavior patterns regarding the lifestyle of people categorize them into different social milieus, the exact same social milieus also socialize them with the usage of specific languages. While the categories at the mesolevel seem quite fixed, language on the microlevel is a relatively fluid parameter, that on the one side reflects these mesolevel characteristics but on the other side also has an own momentum.

I will elaborate how this momentum on the microlevel re-impacts the mesolevel in the next chapter.

### **5.3.3 The Impact of Language Choice on Social Belonging**

After outlining the flow of impact from the mesolevel to the microlevel, this chapter looks at the reverse direction: How does language choice reproduce social milieus? That is to say, the research on the microlevel challenges the mesolevel results.

From the language repertoire that speakers require during their life, they decide in every situation which language and which style to speak. To a huge extent this decision is based on the meanings they wish to convey by choosing a certain language (Gal 1979: 11; Gumperz 1964: 138 in Busch 2012: 2). Language has a symbolic dimension that again “forms one’s linguistic identity” (Storch 2013: 79) and impacts the decision. For Storch this process of choosing can be described as follows:

“A language here is not simply a system that co-exists with other such systems, but has varieties and is used in specific contexts. Such ways of speaking - or keeping silent - are part of the meaningful choice that speaker make, and they are part of a more symbolic practice in communities” (Storch 2013: 84).

So, languages are part of the symbolic practice within communities, namely social milieus, and these meanings and symbolic patterns can also be independent and contradict the internal milieu logic. The meaning or symbolic dimension of a language is performed by speaking it. This was especially visible within the interviews of Social Climbers who state that speaking English resembles a performance. In each situation speaking a specific language generates a meaning due to the context, the speaker and the interlocutors (cf. Canagraja 2018: 48).

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<sup>68</sup>For the aspect of performance also see chapter 5.3.3.

The meaning-creation process within language research strongly is reminiscent of Jeffrey Alexander's theory of cultural pragmatics. He states that each and every interaction between people inherits a meaning. Understanding language as a material object<sup>69</sup> enables to apply Alexander's framework of cultural pragmatics and social performances (Alexander 2004).<sup>70</sup> Already Austin (1975) states that using a particular language is not solely descriptive, but it is also part of a performance (Mast 2011: 9). It is interesting to combine cultural sociology and linguistics at this point as Alexander's structuralism's approach is built upon prior (linguistic!) studies such as Saussure (1964 [1916]).

For Alexander, six elements<sup>71</sup> are playing together to contribute to the success or failure of social performances. These elements overlap with categories in sociolinguistics (cf. Storch 2013: 115). In an ideal situation, all elements would be 'fused' so that an authentic speech situation emerges.<sup>72</sup> Interestingly also in linguistics *authenticity* is keyword as Woolard (2016) points out. *Authenticity* is used to characterize language use of a particular person.

"Linguistic authenticity belongs only to speakers who can claim to be rooted in a particular experience. And in turn the language is taken to be suitable for expressing only that particular perspective" (Woolard 2017).

In the case of language choice, this implies that the actor chooses a language from his repertoire—one makes use of the system of collective representation. For example, in Nairobi one might speak English in order to be seen as being an educated person. The performance, nevertheless, succeeds only if the audience, the interlocutor, understands this particular language and is able to decode the symbolic meaning of the spoken language.

The empirical data as well as prior research (cf. Gal 1979) on language choice and society illuminated that languages get associated with values, norms and attitudes which brings them into a hierarchy of higher and lower languages. Additionally, they diverge in terms of fitting into specific settings and situations (cf. chapter 3.4). As the interviews on language accounts

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<sup>69</sup>Alexander states that a material object is recognizable with ones senses. As spoken language can be heard, it is a material object (Alexander 2010: 11-13).

<sup>70</sup> Language can be regarded as a material object as it meets the criteria for materiality, namely, being recognizable with one's senses (cf. Alexander 2010).

<sup>71</sup>For Alexander these six essential elements of a social performance are: (1) System of collective representation, (2) Actor, (3) Audience, (4) Means of symbolic production, (5) *mise-én-scene*, (6) Social power relations (Alexander 2004).

<sup>72</sup> Alexanders theory of cultural pragmatics goes even further and elaborates on 're-fusion' and 'de-fusion' as complex social structures tear the six elements apart (Alexander 2004). However, this will not be further discussed here.

expressed, in particular Social Climbers struggle with the ‘right’ or the most appropriate language (cf. chapter 5.2.2).

Another example is that of the Young Professionals and their attitude towards Sheng. Although they probably speak Sheng and thereby perform it, they neglect to name it Sheng. Consequently, they have a different *system of collective representation*.

Regarding the question of how language choices reproduces social milieus, the performance theory of cultural sociology provides a framework to understand how choices of languages are made in order to perform a specific role. The aim of this performance can be either to be associated with a certain group or to distance oneself from belonging to a certain group. This research provided examples for both cases: language choice and especially the naming of their language in regards to Sheng among Young Professionals shows the way how language functions as a distance marker. Young Professionals refuse to name their way of speaking Sheng, as they do not want to be part of a certain group of less-educated people. Another example for performing languages are the Social Climbers for whom speaking English is the way to socially belong to another group, to move upwards.

Returning to micro- and macrolevels of research, the results on the microlevel on accounts of language choice within speech interactions illustrated that language choice expresses more complex social structures than the social milieu approach is able to depict. The self-accounts of language choices within my study pointed out shortcomings of the social milieu approach—for example, the inner differentiation within a social milieu and the complexity of feeling being pressured to speak a certain language to adopt to the setting and thus to perform a specific status. More detailed research on the microlevel in addition to macro studies minimizes this shortcoming.

However, this research also showed that the impact of language choices on social belonging and vice versa influence each other mutually. On a metaperspective this also means that meso- and microlevel should be thought and analyzed together.

## **6. Conclusion and Outlook**

As stated in the beginning, Nairobi is a booming megacity that attracts international interest, not only among business people but also among researchers. Among those researches are the Bayreuth Academy of Advanced African Studies and the Berlin project SFB 1265 Re-Figuration of Space—Biographies of Middle Classes. Both analyze social milieus on a macro and mesolevel sociological structures—mainly focusing on the rising middle class.

At the beginning of this thesis, I pointed out the shortcomings of meso and macro analysis, as well as the absence of a multidisciplinary approach, particularly between sociology and language studies. Within this thesis, I elaborated how these two disciplines and their approaches of analysis can mutually enrich each other. Thereby, I followed the question: Do spoken languages distinguish middle class milieus? In addition to the original empirical data gathered from field research in 2019, this thesis contributes on a theoretical level toward more holistic studies and emphasizes the importance of adding micro perspectives to meso or macro studies. For the strain of language study on the other side, it contributes toward multilingual research and provides an example of the complexity of language choices within a society that has more than one language.

### *The Research*

From June to September 2019, I conducted over sixty interviews on how inhabitants of Nairobi choose the language they speak within different situations. In my research, it became obvious over the course of this research that languages differ in meaning, as suggested by Saussure (1964[1916]), who argues that also within *parole* there is a *signifier* and a *signified*, the same applies to languages. Speaking one or the other language, signifies and transmits different meanings. Besides being based on language competences and repertoires, interlocutors choose language due to meaning. These meanings varied in relation to feelings, interlocutor and situations. After recording and transcribing these interviews, they have been coded following the manners of qualitative content analysis (Kuckartz 2014). Grounded in these codes, people have been grouped in different types. As these types resembled with the ones found by Neubert and Stoll (2015), their milieu categories have been adapted and in the following challenged by the microanalysis of language choices. I decided to work with the social milieu approach as it displays sociocultural differences that are not captured in a class or *Schicht* analysis. Although the social milieu approach has been developed from the class theory, it groups people in a more filigree way. Without aiming to explain how differences within a society emerged, the social milieu approach adapts well to different societies. As language is one of the distinction markers and identity-constituting elements within a society, the social milieu approach has been picked to illustrate these varieties. Additionally, self-accounts of language choices have been chosen to focus on the meaning these languages have for the speakers and how one aims to create belonging or to distance him-/herself from others. Here languages as well as self-accounts of language choices play a crucial role for analysis. Although actual spoken language may differ from the self-accounts of language choice, the reflections on language choice provided insights

into the way members of distinct social milieus think and argue about language usage. The example of the two social milieus, Young Professionals and Social Climbers, helped to illustrate the abstract questions about influences of micro-and mesostudies.

### *The Results*

The analysis showed that by moving from class to milieu a frame opens up to look at vertical differentiations among the Kenya urban middle class such as sociocultural parameters. Language is one of one such sociocultural parameters that has a special role within the multilingual context, but has been neglected so far in the social milieu approach for the Global South by Neubert and Stoll (2015; 2018). By combining the two disciplines, sociology and language studies, new insights have been gained. In regards to the milieu study, three-folded results can be observed: besides the addition of more differentiated empirical data toward the milieus, the categories have been challenged by the microanalysis and they have even been adjusted based on the new insights.

For instance, the performing act for the Social Climbers while speaking English has not yet been described in the literature. My data, however, indicates that for Social Climbers speaking English is less a free choice but more experienced as a performance. Social Climbers feel pressured to speak English in specific settings in order to fit to the situation and to achieve their goals. In this case self-accounts of language choice gave insights into how speaking a certain language on purpose, functions as a creator of identity. Speaking English makes one appear to be part of a more educated group of people. The language and the intentional usage create belonging among the Social Climbers.

Furthermore, the statements during my interviews of Young Professionals on Sheng contradict the assumptions in the current literature (cf. Spronk 2012). Against the supposition that many Young Professionals frequently speak Sheng, my research shows that they do speak a mix of English and Swahili, but prefer not to call it Sheng. For Young Professionals, Sheng is associated with less education and lower classes. In order to distinguish themselves from the lower classes, Young Professionals would rather label their way of speaking as 'flat Swahili'. Young Professionals thereby admit that they often switch between languages but refuse to accept Sheng as their language. Refusing the name 'Sheng' for their style of speaking distinguishes them from other Nairobian. Consequently, in this case the self-accounts of language choice express distance and separation from others. Here similarities to other characteristics of the Young Professionals can be seen, such as distancing from extended family in rural areas and spending time among like-minded people.

Additionally, the empirical data showed the imprecise descriptions of milieus on a mesolevel. By adding microanalysis data, an inner distinction within the milieu of Social Climber became visible. The place of origin, whether growing up in the rural area or the city, impacts the self-accounts of language choices. Hence, the degree of using vernacular languages or Swahili is significantly higher among the ones who were born in the rural areas in comparison to the urban population. This distinction in regards to language is probably also recognizable in other aspects of everyday life, when conducting microstudies.

In order to answer my research question whether spoken languages distinguish middle class milieus, the illustrated cases show, that language and the self-accounts about them are used to distinguish middle class milieus. Languages are used for both—for creating belonging and for distancing oneself. Belonging to a specific group of people, for instance, can be observed by Social Climbers performing to speak English. Creating distance to other groups is shown by Young Professionals who neglect to name their way of speaking Sheng, in order to distinguish themselves from lower and less-educated classes and milieus. On a broader level, this study combines sociology and language research that do have the same roots but in recent time have rarely been reconnected. In addition, this study contributes towards the micro-meso-macro discussion within sociology and emphasizes the importance of microanalysis within meso and macro frameworks. Thus, by answering this research question, this study on a theoretical level gave an example of how micro- and meso studies can mutually enrich each other by adding new insights into existing research.

### *Outlook to further Research*

Although new insights have been gained through this study, the topic of language choice in urban Kenya in regards to social milieus are not yet sufficiently researched. This Master's thesis only offers a glimpse of how people think they behave. Indeed, these insights from self-accounts of language choices enables us to challenge the milieu approach and enrich it, but new questions arise. Thus, in a next step a linguistic ethnography picturing the actual spoken languages could contrast the self-accounts of language choices. Additionally, further studies should approach the topic from a broader perspective. More precisely, the sample should be broadened—taking more people into consideration that cover more social milieus and vary in terms of residency within Nairobi. Moreover, the results of my study regarding origin and place of growing up should be verified by a larger sample. Comparing my data on middle class milieu with members from lower or higher classes could also contribute towards new insights. Another aspect I have not focused on yet, is a more systematic way of analyzing language

choices in relation to age, gender and education. One way to do so, would be to take the experts interviews into consideration. Furthermore, this study neglected many parameters that influence language acquisition. Hence, media, education systems, politicians and celebrities that shape language choices have not been regarded sufficiently. As language is a complex phenomenon, further studies should picture this complexity and detangle it.

## 7. References

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## Appendix

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## A) Parameters for Social Milieus

(by Neubert and Stoll 2015)

1. Demography/social position: age, marital status, socialization (rural, urban), place of residence (rural, urban), education, occupation, languages used, social networks (ethnic, socio-economically homogeneous/heterogeneous).
2. Space and places: important places and meeting places, current mobility profile (more in the home, more outside the home), spatial dimension of social networks including long distance contacts (internet, telephone), urban-rural contacts, diaspora contacts, personal experience of migration and travel.
3. Aims in life: basic values, identity, home (rural/urban), savings, investments, consumption, what is a “good life”, perspectives for old age, burial place.
4. Work/performance: role of occupation (just a job or constitutive of identity), career orientation, work ethos, socio-economic mobility, attitude to education.
5. Ideals and role models: elements of a “good life”, wishes, fantasies, role models, visions or plans for the future, fundamental value orientations, consumption and savings behaviour.
6. Image of society: basic social principles, political and civil society engagement, satisfaction with political and social system, perception of social problems, bases/sources of trust.
7. Family/partnership, gender roles: family values, gender roles, partnership, sexual morality.
8. Leisure/communication: Leisure activities: family, nightclubs/dancing, events, reading, DVDs, sports (active, passive), general hedonism,
9. Communication: role of the internet, IT social networks, newspapers, TV, radio.
10. Everyday aesthetics: clothing, home, furnishings, equipment, hairstyle, body image, art, demonstrative consumption, status symbols.

## **B) Semi-Structured Interview Guiding Questions (July 2019)**

*During my stay in East Africa and my studies, I recognized the richness of Kenya as a multilingual nation and I got interested in which languages are spoken when by whom and why. In order to answer these questions, I am currently conducting field research in Nairobi, focusing on language use within the Middle Class. Therefore, I would be delighted if you would be willing to help me in my research. In order to be able to remember your answers, I would like to record the interview, but in my Master thesis all your personal information will be anonymized. Furthermore, I want to point out that it is not about giving a “correct” answer, but rather giving me insights into your everyday life and sharing your personal opinions.*

- 1) In your opinion, which languages are spoken in Nairobi and by whom?
- 2) Would you like to tell me, which of these languages do you speak?
- 3) How and when did you learn these languages? Can you walk me through your life? Starting in your early childhood, going to primary and secondary school, which language did you used to speak?
  - a. Did your language choices change over the years? How would you describe it?
  - b. Who or what has influenced you learning these languages?
  - c. Has literature in these languages influences your interests in these languages?
  - d. If yes, can you name some authors or titles?
- 4) In which situation do you choose to speak which language to whom? Please walk me through your day: Let’s start in the morning, when you wake up...
  - a. Are there languages you only speak to specific people (among friends, with your partner)?
  - b. Are there situations where you tend to always use the same language? Can you tell me more about them?
  - c. Are there topics where you feel more comfortable to speak in one or the other language?
  - d. Are there places (like home, at work at the market) where you prefer to speak a specific language? Can you describe such a situation for me?
- 5) How would you describe your feelings towards English/Swahili/vernacular/Sheng?
  - a. Is it easier/ harder to express yourself in one of these languages?
  - b. Do you feel closer to one or the other language?
- 6) Did you ever had the feeling that you used the “wrong” language in a situation? If yes, can you give an example?
- 7) Do you know someone in Nairobi who speaks mainly mainly languages? Can you tell me more about them?
  - a. In which language do they raise their children?
- 8) Do you know someone in Nairobi who only speaks English? How would you characterize them?
  - a. Would they also exclusively speak English to their children?
- 9) How do you see the language-scape of Nairobi in 10 and 50 years? What will change (if something changes)?
- 10) Which language do you use to talk to...
  - a) Your grandpartents and their generation?
  - b) To your parents and their generation?

- c) Your sisters and brothers?
- d) To friends in the same age?
- e) To your own children? (if you don't have any yet, which language will you use to raise them?)
- f) To a doctor?
- g) To a market/street seller?
- h) To bilingual government officials?
- i) In which language are you praying?
- j) In which language are you thinking?
- k) In which language are you dreaming?

11) Which language would you use in the following situations?

- a) When you are happy?
- b) When you are angry?
- c) When you are serious?
- d) When you want to be romantic?
- e) When you are joking?
- f) When you are sad?
- g) When you want to be professional?
- h) When you want to be hip/cool?

12) Demographic questions

- a. How old are you?
- b. What is your ethnicity?
- c. What is your current educational level?
- d. How would you identify your religious affiliation (if any)?
- e. What is your current occupation?
- f. In which neighborhood do you live in Nairobi?
- g. When did you move to Nairobi (or have you been born here)?

13) Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

**C) Overview of all conducted interviews**

<b>Number</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Neighborhood</b>	<b>Years in Nairobi</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Date of Interview</b>	<b>Duration of interview</b>	<b>Place of Interview</b>	<b>Religion</b>	<b>Education</b>
1	f	19	Nairobi West	1 <sub>month</sub>	Masaai	student	28th June 2019	24:48-3	ACK canteen outdoor	Chr Anglican	BA International Relation
2	f	30	Kasalani	10	Gikuyu	care-giver	28th June 2019	23:21-9	ACK canteen indoor	Christian	Form Four
3	f	21	Embakasi	21	Gikuyu	Hospitality at a guesthouse	29th June 2019	54:22-7	Peach Restaurant	Chr Bethel	College
4	f	24	Lavington	4	Kamba	BA student sociology	30th June 2019	17:37-9	Nai Museum outdoor	Chr Valley Road	BA UoN
5	m	25	Ngara	4	Samburu	student; fashion business	2nd July 2019	24:05:00	restaurant Ngara	Chr	BA KU
6	m	33	Kambu county	?	Gikuyu	Inspector	2nd July 2019	17:30-2	Restaurant Ngara	Chr Cath	?
7	m	35	Ngara	8	Meru	law student MKU	3rd July 2019	18:52-4	restaurant Ngara	Chr Cath	Law MKU
8	m	65*	?	?	Gikuyu	Gikuyu teacher	3rd July 2019	13:23-4	ACK language school	Chr	?

<b>9</b>	m	23	South C	23	Gikuyu	Student	3rd July 2019	13:23-4	ACK language school	Chr	BA
<b>10</b>	f	21	Karen	21	Gikuyu	Student	3rd July 2019	13:23-4	ACK language school	Chr	BA
<b>11</b>	f	53	Kikuyu	?	Gikuyu	School principle	3rd July 2019	28:18-4	ACK language school	Chr Anglican	BA KU Education
<b>12</b>	f	30	Ngumu	30	Gikuyu	Program officer NGO	3rd July 2019	34:21-6	NGO's office	Chr Protestant	MA
<b>13</b>	m	34	Ngara	5	Kisii	Insurance company	4th July 2019	39:44-5	Restaurant Ngara	Chr	BA applied statistics
<b>14</b>	m	33	Nairobi West	15	Gikuyu	Banker	4th July 2019	35:08-2	Hamid restaurant	Chr Catholic	MA Finance
<b>15</b>	m	35 *	Kibera	35*	?	Boxing coach	5th July 2019	26:06-2	Nyayo Stadium	Chr	?
<b>16</b>	m	48	Kilimani	12	Kalenjin	National insurance	5th July 2019	26:03-9	ACK canteen outdoor	Chr	BA
<b>17</b>	m	48	Kibera	48	Luo	Social worker	6th July 2019	39:44-2	Java Adams Arcade	Chr Pentecost	?
<b>18</b>	f	24	Ngara	24	Gikuyu	Student UoN	6th July 2019	37:01-1	Home in Ngara	Chr Catholic	BA Sociology
<b>19</b>	m	46	Kerbu County	9	Gikuyu	Lecturer	9th July 2019	38:53-2	Office USIU	Chr	?
<b>20</b>	f	45 *	Thome	?	Msomali	Spanish lecturer	9th July 2019	31:46-7	Office USIU	Muslim	PhD
<b>21</b>	f	23	Kariako	23	Luo	Student USIU	9th July 2019	49:13-2	Office USIU	Chr	IBA Consulting
<b>22</b>	f	19	South C	19	Sikh	Student USIU	9th July 2019	49:13-2	Office USIU	Sikh	BA Int Relations

23	f	22	Kimathi Estate	22	Luhya	Student USIU	9th July 2019	49:13-2	office USIU	Chr	BA Journalism, Statistics
24	m	25	Pangani	15	Kamba	Student USIU, working	9th July 2019	33:32-1	Office USIU	Chr	MA Computer Science
25	m	41	Kibera	?	Gikuyu	Taxi driver	9th July 2019	28:55-3	Taxi	Chr	?
26	m	?	?	?	?	Professor	9th July 2019	53:32-1	Office UISU	Chr	Professor
27	f	25	Harlinghum	7months	Ndigo	Domestic defense/ army	17th July 2019	22:36-6	Java Yaya House	Muslim	Form Four
28	f	27	Lavington	5	Kamba	Student; mum	22nd July 2019	26:57-1	Home in Lavington	Chr	MA Economics
29	f	38	Kiten-gela	15	Kisii	Insurance	22nd July 2019	21:23-6	Peach Restaurant	Chr Catholic	Diploma
30	m	57	Nguru-guru	43	?	Prof; author	23rd July 2019	41:12-5	UoN	?	Professor
31	m	?	?	?	?	Prof; author	23rd July 2019	63:26-5	UoN	?	Professor
32	m	52	Kiten-gela	25	Meru	Prof; author	23rd July 2019	19:41-9	UoN	?	Professor
33	f	44	Long-nata	20	Gikuyu	Entrepreneur	25th July 2019	51:12-8	ACK canteen outdoor	Chr	MA
34	f	26	Embakasi	22	Luhya	Journalist	27th July 2019	1:19:37-9	Java CBD	Chr	MA develop communication
35	m	23	?	?	Luo	Student	8th August 2019	37:00-4	Railways canteen	Chr Catholic	Form Four
36	m	37	West-lands	15	Idacho	Author	8th August 2019	36:13-8	Railways canteen	Chr Quaker	Diploma



37	m	32	Kibera	26	Luyhia	Lab assistance	10th August 2019	36:07-5	Lab Kibera	Chr	Diploma
38	m	22	Kibera	22	Luo	Student	10th August 2019	20:15-4	Home Kibera	Chr	?
39	f	46	Kibera	24	Luo	Mother	10th August 2019	29:41-2	Home Kibera	Chr	Darasa la nane
40	m	29	Thika Road	29	Luo	Doctor	10th August 2019	23:31-1	Dispensary	Chr Sevenday-Adventist	Diploma
41	f	27	Lavington	25	Kisii	Entrepreneur	13th August 2019	36:00-5	Java Valley Arcade	Chr Protestant Sitam	Degree business management
42	m	23	Kwangware	0.5	Gikuyu	Fitness trainer	15th August 2019	26:23-1	Gym Hurlingham	Chr	Degree
43	m	27	Eastlands	4	Luo	Lawyer	15th August 2019	26:46-9	Java Yaya House	Chr Pentecost	Degree
44	m	55	Kenyatta Market	17	Eriteria	Teacher/un-employed	19th August 2019	32:15-6	KeshKesh	Chr Lutheran	?
45	f	19*	Kenyatta Market	2months	Mchagga, TZ	Shop seller	20th August 2019	Not recorded	Kiosk Kenyatta Market	?	?
46	f	30	South B	30	Luhiya	researcher: student; singer	22nd August 2019	50:52-0	Alliance Francaise	Chr Royal Assembly	BA
47	m	63	Madaraka Estate	40	Ekegusi	music teacher	22nd August 2019	1:04:28-6	All Saints church	Chr Lutheran	?
48	m	38	CBD	38	Urdu	Sheik; Imam	23rd August 2019	28:27-8	Hamid restaurant	Muslim	MA Islamic studies
49	f	30	Kilimani	30	None	Real Estate	23rd August 2019	1:05:28-9	Home Kilimani	None	Degree computer engineering

50	f	34	Kilimani	34	Gikuyu	NGO consultant	23rd August 2019	47:09-8	KeshKesh	Chr	MA
51	f	71	Madar-aka Estate	44	Kinyakusa, TZ	UN secretary	26th August 2019	55:53-4	Restaurant CBD	Chr Lutheran	Standard 8
52	f	51	Rongata Rongai	25	Kisii	Community worker	27th August 2019	43:31-6	Restaurant CBD	Chr	Diploma
53	f	30*	Kilimani – Riverside	30*	Gikuyu	Entrepreneur	27th August 2019	41:27:00	Home Kilimani	Chr Baptist	Diploma
54	f	43	Kilimani	43*	Kamba	Entrepreneur	27th August 2019	30:26-0	Home Kilimani	Chr Pentecost	Diploma
55	f	35*	Kawang-ware	35*	Gikuyu	Mother; home teacher	29th August 2019	24:36-0	home	Chr	BA accounting
56	m	11	Kawang-ware	11	Gikuyu	Child	29th August 2019	13:34-4	Home	Chr	Child
57	m	8*	Kawang-ware	8*	Gikuyu	Child	29th August 2019	9:49-7	Home	Chr	Child
58	m	46	Kawang-ware	46	Gikuyu	Father; NGO	29th August 2019	43:30-4	Home	Chr	BA natural science UoN
59	f	58	East-lands	58	Gikuyu	Assistance; mother	2nd September 2019	38:13-9	Pizza Place CBD	Chr prayers beyond boundaries	Form four
60	m	37	Embakasi	20	Kisii	Pastor	2nd September 2019	53:37-6	Hamid restaurant	Chr Lutheran	Theology
61	m	37	?	10	Luhya	Driver	3rd September 2019	25:15-8	Art gallery restaurant	Chr Sitam	Motor-vehicle
62	m	33	Kongoo	33	Luhya	Climate advocacy	3rd September 2019	41:44-1	Java CBD	None	MA

BA=Bachelor of Arts; MA= Master of Arts; Chr=Christian; \*=age not exactly known

**D) Young Professionals—Demographic Data**

<b>Number</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Neighborhood</b>	<b>Years in Nairobi</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Date of Interview</b>	<b>Duration of interview</b>	<b>Place of Interview</b>	<b>Religion</b>	<b>Education</b>
12	f	30	Ngumu	30	Gikuyu	Program officer intern. NGO	3rd July 2019	34:21-6	DAAD office	Chr Protestant	MA
14	m	33	Nairobi West	15	Gikuyu	Banker	4th July 2019	35:08-2	Hamid restaurant	Chr Catholic	MA Finance
34	f	26	Embakasi	22	Luhiya	Journalist	27th July 2019	1:19:37-9	Java CBD	Chr	MA develop communication
41	f	27	Lavington	25	Kisii	Entrepreneur	13th Aug 2019	36:00-5	Java Valley Arcade	Chr Protestant Sitam	Degree business management
49	f	30	Kilimani	30	None	Real Estate	23rd Aug 2019	1:05:28-9	Home Kilimani	None	Degree computer engineering
50	f	34	Kilimani	34	Gikuyu	NGO consultant	23rd Aug 2019	47:09-8	Kesh-Kesh	Chr	MA

Chr= Christian; MA= Master of Arts

**E) Social Climbers—Demographic Data**

Number	Gender	Age	Neighborhood	Years in Nairobi	Ethnicity	Occupation	Date of Interview	Duration of interview	Place of Interview	Religion	Education
2	f	30	Kasalani	10	Gikuyu	care-giver	28th June 2019	23:21-9	ACK canteen indoor	Christian	Form Four
3	f	21	Embakasi	21	Gikuyu	Hospitality guesthouse	29th June 2019	54:22-7	Peach Restaurant	Chr Bethel	College
13	m	34	Ngara	5	Kisii	Insurance company	4th July 2019	39:44-5	Restaurant Ngara	Chr	BA applied statistics
42	m	23	Kwangware	0.5	Gikuyu	Fitness trainer	15th Aug 2019	26:23-1	Gym Hurlingham	Chr	Degree
53	f	30*	Kilimani	30*	Gikuyu	Entrepreneur	27th Aug 2019	41:27:00	Home Winny Kilimani	Chr aptist	Diploma
54	f	43	Kilimani	43*	Kamba	Entrepreneur	27th Aug 2019	30:26-0	Home Winny Kilimani	Chr Pentecost	Diploma
61	m	37	?	10	Luhya	Driver	3rd Sept 2019	25:15-8	Art gallery restaurant	Chr Sitam	Motorvehicle

\*=age not exactly known;

Chr= Christian

BA= Bachelor of Arts

**F) Young Professionals- Language Choice and Interlocutor**

Number	Gender	Age	Grandparents	Parents	Siblings	Partner	Friends	Children	Doctor	Government official	Street vendor	Thinking	Dreaming	Praying
<b>Young Professionals</b>														
12	f	30	V	Eng, Swa V	Swa; Eng	Eng (Swa)	/	Eng	Eng	Eng	Swa	Eng (Swa)	Eng	Eng
14	m	33	Swa	Swa	Swa V Eng	Eng Swa Sh	Swa Sh Eng	(Eng) (Swa) Sh	Eng	Eng	V Swa Sh	Eng Swa Sh V	Eng Swa	Eng
34	f	26	Swa	Swa	Swa	Swa Eng	Swa, Eng	Swa	Eng	Eng Swa	Swa	Eng	Eng	/
41	f	27	V	Eng	Sh	Eng	Sh Eng	Eng	Eng Swa	Swa Eng Sh	Swa	Eng	Eng	Eng
49	f	30	Eng Swa	Eng, Swa	Eng Swa	Eng	Eng	Eng (Swa)	Eng	Eng	Eng Swa Sh	Eng	Eng	Eng
50	f	34	V Swa	Swa	Swa (Eng)	Eng (Swa)	/	Eng	Eng	Swa	Swa	Eng	Eng	Eng

Eng= English; Swa=Swahili

V=Vernacular language; Sh=Sheng

**G) Students-future Young Professionals—Language Choice and Interlocutor**

Number	Gender	Age	Grandparents	Parents	Siblings	Partner	Friends	Children	Doctor	Government official	Street vendor	Thinking	Dreaming	Praying
5	f	24	V Swa	Sw V Eng	Eng Swa Sh V	/	Swa (Sh) (Eng)	Swa (Eng)	Eng Swa	Eng	Swa	Swa	Eng V Swa	Eng Swa
6	m	25	V	V	Swa V	/	V Swa	Swa	Swa	Swa Eng	/	Swa	Eng Swa	Swa
8	m	25	/	V	/	V	V Sh	Swa Eng	Eng	Swa	Swa Sh	Eng	Eng Swa Sh	Eng
9	m	23	V	Eng Swa Sh	/	/	/	Eng	Eng	Swa	Swa	Eng	Eng Swa Sh V	Eng
10	m	21	V	Eng Swa Sh	/	/	/	Eng Swa	Eng	Eng	Swa	Eng Swa	Eng	Eng
18	f	24	V	V	V Swa	Eng Swa V	Eng (Swa)	Eng	Eng	Eng	Swa	Eng	Eng (Swa)	Eng
21	f	23	Swa	Swa	Swa Eng	Eng Swa	Eng	/	Eng	Eng	Swa	Eng	Eng	Eng
22	f	19	V	V	Eng	/	Eng (V)	/	Eng	Eng	Eng	Eng	Eng	V
23	f	22	V	V Swa Eng	Swa Eng	Eng	Eng	/	Eng	Eng	Swa	Eng	Eng	Eng

Eng= English; Swa=Swahili  
V=Vernacular language; Sh=Sheng

### H) Social Climbers—Language choice and Interlocutor

Number	Gender	Age	Grandparents	Parents	Siblings	Partner	Friends	Children	Doctor	Government official	Street vendor	Thinking	Dreaming	Praying
<b>Social Climbers born in countryside</b>														
2	f	30	V	V	V	V Eng Swa	Swa Sh V	Swa	Eng Swa	Eng	/	(V)	Eng V Swa	Eng (Swa) (V)
13	m	34	V	V	/	Swa	Swa	Eng Swa	Swa	Eng	Swa V	Eng (Swa)	Eng	Eng
42	m	23	V		Sh	Swa Sh	Sh	/	Eng Swa	Eng Swa	Sh	Eng	Swa	Swa
61	m	37	Swa	Swa	Swa V	V	/	Swa	Swa	Eng	Swa	Swa	all	Swa
<b>Social Climbers born in Nairobi</b>														
3	f	21	V	Swa V	Sh	Sh	Sh	Sh Swa	Swa	/	Swa	Eng	Eng Sh Swa	Eng, V
53	f	30*	Swa	Swa Sh	Swa Sh	Eng	/	/	Eng	Eng, Swa	Sh	Eng	all	Eng
54	f	43	V	Eng Swa Sh	Eng Swa	Eng	Eng Swa S V	/	Eng	Eng	Sh	Eng	Eng	Eng

Eng= English; Swa=Swahili; V=Vernacular language; Sh=Sheng;

**D) Social Climbers and Young Professionals—Language Choice and Feelings**

Number	Gender	Age		Angry	Happy	Serious	Romantic	Joking	Sad	Professional	Cool/Hip
<b>Social Climbers born in countryside</b>											
2	f	30		/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
13	m	34		/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
42	m	23		Swa, Sh, V, Eng	Swa, Sh	Eng	Eng	Swa	all	Eng	Sh, Eng
61	m	37		Swa	Swa	Eng, Swa	Eng	Swa	/	Eng	Sh
<b>Social Climbers born in Nairobi</b>											
3	f	21		/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
53	f	30*		Eng	Swa, Sh	Eng	Eng	Swa, Sh	Eng	Eng	Sh
54	f	43		Eng	V, Sh	Eng	Eng	Sh	Eng	Eng	Eng
<b>Young Professionals</b>											
12	f	30		/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
14	m	33		/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
34	f	26		/	Eng, Swa, V	Eng	Eng	Swa	V	Eng	Sh
41	f	27		Eng, Swa	Eng	Eng	Eng	Swa	/	Eng	Sh
49	f	30		Eng	Eng	Eng	Swa	Sh	Eng	Eng	Eng
50	f	34		/	Eng (Swa, Sh)	Eng	Eng	Swa	Eng Swa	Eng	Eng

\*=age not exactly known

Eng= English; Swa=Swahili

V=Vernacular language; Sh=Sheng



## J) List of codes

List of codes	Frequency
Code system	1155
Literature	25
languages in Nairobi	30
mixing languages	52
languages I speak	39
my life	51
my day	37
Nairobi 50 years	33
interlocutor	0
boss	3
praying	35
church activities	12
dreaming	35
thinking	35
seller	36
government official	33
doctor	32
children	32
own children	46
spouse	23
friends	36
grandparents	29
siblings	34
parents	32
acquisition	10
texting	5
performance	47
wrong language	48
feelings	22
jealous	1
Swahili	32
Sheng	37
Vernacular	29
English	55
cool/hip	19
professional	17
sad	15
joking	21
romantic	20
serious	19
angry	18
happy	20

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