STUDENTS' USE OF ENGLISH L1 KNOWLEDGE TO NEGOTIATE SWAHILI L2 MEANING

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Abstract

While first language acquisition is almost invariably effortless, the same is hardly the case with second language acquisition. Although people are increasingly getting involved in learning additional languages all over the world, the exercise of learning a second, more so a foreign language, presents several challenges. One challenge that has often been mentioned has to do with the fact that in learning a second language one is not only learning a different set of linguistic structures and rules, but also the culture that is an integral part of the language. One can, therefore, assume that the bigger the linguistic and cultural difference between the two languages, the more daunting the task of learning the second language becomes. However, there are a number of strategies that learners employ to meet second language learning challenges. One such strategy is the ever present and almost obvious urge to transfer their first language knowledge to the second language. While helpful, the practice often presents a different set of challenges. The present study attempts to analyze the way English speaking students of Kiswahili apply their knowledge of English in negotiating meaning with their instructors in Kiswahili language classes. Drawing data from a small liberal arts college in upstate New York in the US, it examines the effects of using the cultural background underpinning the use of English in America to the teaching and learning of Kiswahili. An attempt is made to answer the following questions: Is meaning misrepresented or even compromised for convenience as students attempt to force Kiswahili to fit into English language and American culture? What common language errors result from the practice, and what strategies can be utilized to deal with them?

1.0 Introduction

While it is widely accepted that there is a very close relationship between language and culture, the nature of the relationship is one in which there is little agreement. To some, language is simply a vehicle used to describe a peoples' culture, but to others language is an integral part of that culture. The latter position holds that the two are, in fact, inseparable. In that view, therefore, you cannot talk about one in exclusion of the other. Shaul and Furbee's statement, "...language is mirror to the mind, culture its larger expression, and society its context for revelation (1998:5)" describes very well the extent to which language and culture are inextricably intertwined. This study reviews, albeit in no detail, the language and culture debate; it then proceeds to deal with the increasingly important role of culture in the second and foreign language classroom. It then provides examples of the influence of English L1 culture on the learning of Kiswahili L2 in a US university. It concludes by calling on language instructors to

always consider cultural knowledge as an integral part of the process of attaining communicative competence.

2.0 Language and Culture

The relationship between language and culture is one of the central concerns of linguistic anthropology, with the main issue being the manner of relation involved. Indeed, in the Whorfian thinking, language structures thought but the degree to which it does so is less clear. If, in fact, language structures thought, is it not true then that a learner of a second language may find difficulties emanating from the fact that a completely different thought process is involved in the language being learned? There has been a protracted debate, especially among anthropologists and sociologists, on the language and culture relationship. A name that almost invariably comes up in this debate is that of Edward Sapir. Cited in Thanasoulas (2001), Sapir (1970: 20) says "language does not exist apart from culture, that is, from the socially inherited assemblage of practices and beliefs that determines the texture of our lives." He has, however, been accused of being inconsistent in his views on the subject (Thanasoulas, 2001; Shaul and Furbee, 1998). For instance, according to Shaul and Furbee (1998: 39), he on the one hand doubts the relationship between language and culture, preferring to view them as unrelated processes, while on the other "postulates some intimate connection between these two." Though he regarded language as the primary influence for the individual, he also accepted that, for society, culture might influence language (Shaul and Furbee *ibid*: 42). The same is pointed out by Thanasoulas (2001) who indicates that on the one hand Sapir said that language, race and culture are not necessarily correlated, while admitting later that, in a way, the two are the same. While Edward Sapir, therefore, believed more in linguistic relativism, in which language is seen as having an influence over thought, his student Benjamin Lee Whorf, went beyond relativism and clearly favored linguistic determinism. In the latter, language actually is believed to be shaping thought.

In general, due to the language culture relationship, we should expect that societies do encode different meanings and cultural value patterns in their words and expressions (language). This brings to the fore the concept of cultural presupposition, which according to Bonvillain (1993: 70) "refers to the fact that participants in speech interactions come to encounters with an array of knowledge and understandings (models) of their culture as encoded and transmitted through language...". These presuppositions are learned and collected by people in their enculturation experiences. When speakers share these cultural presuppositions, communication is made easy because a mention of words and other expressions is interpreted within a shared cultural context. Consequently, in learning a language,

it is not enough to master the words and expressions without an understanding of the cultural value patterns that they embody in the community of its speakers. This need is very well captured by Bonvillain (ibid: 72) who says "...to gain insights into a people's world view or system of values, it is necessary to ascertain the cultural symbols embedded in their words. This is one reason why translation from one language into another is never completely accurate". It is indeed the case, as pointed out by Thanasoulas (2001), that language has a setting. In that sense then, those who speak it, themselves members of particular groups, do hold specific cultural roles which influence their use of language.

It is an acknowledged fact that foreign language learning is foreign culture learning, and that culture has, though in varying degrees, been an important part of the foreign language curriculum (Gardner, 1985; Thanasoulas, 2001; Dörnyei, 2001). It is in the same realization, I believe, that Schleicher and Moshi (2000: 135) identified cultural competence as a significant and integral part of the language teaching enterprise. In view of the above, it is critical that language instructors maintain contact with the language and culture at the source to ensure the cultural competence. The importance of culture in the language classroom is elaborated further by Dörnyei (2001: 46):

> ...on the one hand, a L2 is a 'learnable' school subject in that discrete elements of the communication code can be taught explicitly. Thus, the results of studies on academic achievement motivation are of direct relevance when talking about the mastery of a L2. On the other hand, language is also socially and culturally bound, and serves as the primary channel of social organization in society. This means that the mastery of a L2 is not merely an educational issue; comparable to that of the mastery of other subject matters, but it is also a deeply social event that requires the incorporation of a wide range of elements of the L2 culture.

Failure to take these and other similar cultural differences into account in language teaching will often lead to gross misrepresentation of L2 language meaning. As pointed out by Thanasoulas (2001), the results will invariably be misunderstandings and cross-cultural miscommunication. Politzer (1959: 100-101, cited in Thanasoulas, 2001) emphasizes the point by stating that teaching a language without teaching the culture in which it operates, is tantamount to teaching symbols with no meaning, or symbols to which wrong meanings may be attached. Indeed cultural awareness is very significant in attaining communicative competence, defined by Bonvillain (1993: 276) as "the ability to function according to cultural models for linguistic and communicative interaction."

In view of the above, it would be expected that culture forms a very significant part of all language programs. Is that the case? Thanasoulas (2001)

thinks that culture has not been given the attention it deserves, and calls for its greater incorporation into the foreign language curriculum as well as the learners' view of life. The following emphasizes that position:

> ...we cannot go about teaching a foreign language without at least offering some insights into its speakers' culture. By the same token, we cannot go about fostering 'communicative competence' without taking into account the different views and perspectives of people in different cultures which may enhance or even inhibit communication (Thanasoulas, 2001).

Despite all what has been said about language and culture, the teaching of culture in language classrooms has not been without controversy. It has been a concern to language teaching professionals and researchers for a long time. According to Thanasoulas (2001), two main perspectives have been utilized in the teaching of culture. One involves the transmission of cultural information and mainly utilizes literature and the arts to focus on customs, habits and folklore. It has, however, been faulted for focusing on facts rather than meaning. The second, "drawing upon cross-cultural psychology or anthropology, has been to embed culture within an interpretive framework and establish connection, namely, points of reference or departure, between one's own and the target culture." (*ibid.*). This too, is being faulted for leaving the learners' on their own in integrating the cultural knowledge that they have acquired. He goes on to allege that most educators have viewed culture as another skill to be imparted to the learners. Instead, it should be seen as "an integral part of communicative competence and intercultural awareness at which every 'educated individual' should aim". The third perspective that is then offered claims "that cultural knowledge is not only an aspect of communicative competence, but an educational objective in its own right" (Thanasoulas, 2001). In this sense, the teaching of culture should be viewed as a means of "developing an awareness of and sensitivity towards the values and traditions of the people whose language is being studied" (Tucker and Lambert, 1972 cited in Thanasoulas, 2001).

Nonetheless, the picture is not as grim as painted above. Over time, the teaching of culture has increasingly become an important part of the second and foreign language teaching curriculum. Dubreil (2006) gives a very good account of the development that the role of culture in the foreign language curriculum has undergone over time. He notes more incorporation of culture in language teaching, and emphasizes the current three categories: cultural practices, products, and perspectives advocated for by the *Standards* (Dubreil, 2006: 240). The three 'Ps' are now the embodiment of the place of culture in language learning. While discussing the role of CMC (computer mediated communication) in language

teaching, Abrams (2006) and Lomicka (2006) have acknowledged the significance of intercultural knowledge as an integral part of language learning.

The same emphasis on culture in the language curriculum has been noted with respect to the teaching of African languages in the US. The development can be attributable, in part, to studies by scholars like Gleisner (2002) and Folarin-Schleicher and Moshi (2000), which emphasized the need to foreground culture as the core of foreign language instruction. The progression, though gradual, has been aptly captured by Galloway (1999:156) as a movement from "I teach language (and culture, if there is time)" to "I teach culture, through the tools of its language". This development has also been aided by a realization that most learners come to the classroom with more interest in the target culture (C2) than simply to learn the foreign language (L2). Is it not, in fact, the case that people learn new languages in order to do business and function in the new culture? Such a need would hardly be served by a curriculum that pays little attention to culture. A survey on African language instruction methodology by Folarin-Schleicher and Moshi (2000) was informed that most teachers are consciously progressing towards fully integrating communicative approaches in their teaching methods, presupposing that culture has continuously gained a more central role.

Having students who are eager to learn the target culture is not the only ingredient required to give culture a central role in the language classroom. There is also need to ensure that we have culturally-competent teachers, as well as cross-culturally competent textbooks. It has been rightly emphasized that there is a very great need to develop materials that promote intercultural language learning, which attempt to raise teachers and students who are aware of their culture and also able to interpret, understand and appreciate other cultures (Alptekin, 2002; Byram, 1997; Kilickaya, 2004; Kramsch, 2000; Leather, 2001).

Turning to the teaching of Kiswahili in the US it is clear that writers of the main textbooks used by instructors have conscientiously taken culture into account, albeit in varying degrees. Indeed, Folarin-Schleicher and Moshi (2000) and Folarin-Schleicher and Gleisner (2001) used a variety of criteria to evaluate the current status of culture in some widely used textbooks in Hausa, Kiswahili and Yoruba. The studies' conclusions emphasize the fact that while new texts are emerging that attempt to integrate culture and communicative approaches to African language teaching, the presentation of African culture in most of these textbooks is sporadic and peripheral with more emphasis on grammatical analysis than cultural exposure.

Gleisner (2002) did a comprehensive evaluation of cultural content in 13 first year Kiswahili textbooks spanning 100 years, and using a seven-point criteria that texts should meet to be acceptable as culturally sufficient. The conclusion

was that *Kiswahili kwa Kitendo: An Iintroductory Course* (Zawawi, 1971); *Twende! A Practical Swahili Course* (Maw, 1985); *Kiswahili: Msingi wa Kusema, Kusoma na Kuandika* (Hinnebusch and Mirza, 1998) and *Tujifunze Kiswahili* (Mugane, 1999) were considered to be almost acceptable in their cultural content, although each individual text had insufficiencies in several aspects of the criteria. A later publication, *Tuseme Kiswahili: a Multidimensional Approach to the Teaching and Learning of Swahili as a Foreign Language* (Senkoro, 2003), together with *Tujifunze Kiswahili* (Mugane, 1999) have an abundance of culture notes. It is, however, important to note that it is not realistic to expect any one language textbook to meet all the requirements of an efficient language and culture teaching classroom. Language teachers must be prepared to go beyond the textbook, seeking any other relevant materials that can be used to augment the textbooks. This is not an option, especially because culture is never static. Despite the great efforts to include culture in teaching materials preparation, L1 and L2 cultural differences still constitute challenges that must be overcome by a foreign language learner. The following section looks at how this plays out in the learning of Kiswahili.

3.0 English L1 Knowledge in a Kiswahili L2 Classroom

To the extent that language and culture are closely related, we should expect that students of another language are not only experiencing a new language, but also a new culture. In the process learners often meet both similarities and differences. Usually, it is the differences that become a cause of concern. Learners may find certain concepts expressed differently, or not available at all in the target language as understood in their language. The former provides a major challenge as one may find it difficult to adjust to the different way. This leads to the linguistic transfer phenomenon in which a learner, eager or required to use the target language, resorts to his first language experience and applies it to the target language. The results of such actions may be distortions of intended meaning or generation of an entirely different meaning. In certain instances, the resultant target language output, though using genuine target language words, ends up being completely meaningless. The learning process can be made much easier by avoiding the urge to simply seek equivalents of L1 words in the target language (Burling, 1970: 9). He distinguishes two ways in which this presents challenges. On the one hand, certain L1 words may require two, three or more equivalents in the L2, and to make it worse they may also require to be used in different conditions. On the other hand, the L1 often also has two or three words translated by the same word in the L2.

This section presents observations of the influence of English knowledge in a Kiswahili classroom. Using data from Kiswahili classrooms over a 2 years period (4 semesters) in St. Lawrence University, a small liberal arts college in Canton, New York, the study shows the interplay between L1 knowledge and L2 learning. The total number of students handled by the author over that period was 56.

Emanating from the following observations is a clear tendency for students to apply what they know in their L1 (English for most of them) to their encounter with Kiswahili. As a result, the phenomenon of linguistic transfer is evident. However, the central argument being posited here is that it is not only the language structures that are of concern, rather it is the entire cultural framework within which English is used. As a result, we are not talking only about incorrect usage of different grammatical structures, for instance, wrong positioning of an adjective in a sentence, rather also about instances of meaning misrepresentation emanating from cultural differences in viewing similar things. The former is easier to demonstrate.

In English, adjectives come before the noun that they modify. It is therefore the norm to talk about:

1. A big boy
   A fat student

The same is not true in Kiswahili in which the adjective follows the noun being modified. Therefore, to return to the two examples above, in Kiswahili we would have:

2. *Mvulana mkubwa (boy big)*
   Mwanafunzi mnene (student fat)

Likewise, in indicating possession in English, the possessive pronouns come before the noun, hence you have:

3. My father
   Your brother

The reverse is the case in Kiswahili and the correct form is therefore:

4. *Baba yangu (father my)*
   Kaka yako (brother your)

It is, however, not uncommon to have students applying their English language knowledge in Kiswahili constructions as follows:

5. *(M)kubwa mvulana (big boy)*
   (M)nene mwanafunzi (fat student)
   Yangu baba (my father)
   Yako Kaka (your brother)

It is the latter scenario (instances of meaning misrepresentation emanating from cultural differences in viewing similar things) that will form the focus of the remaining part of this paper. The observations presented serve to show us how a distortion of meaning occurs in the second or foreign language when a learner employs his first language and cultural background in the second/foreign language. Most often, especially in the initial stages, learners are convinced that they are correct. It only dawns on them later that they are correct in so far as the English language use patterns are concerned, and even then, only in their cultural context, but wrong in the cultural context within which Kiswahili is used. Some of the differences arising out of the cultural differences may appear funny or even a little bizarre but this changes as it becomes clearer with time. Likewise, to the Kiswahili instructor, some of the students' language outputs may sound unusual and funny. Often times the instructor, especially once a rapport was established with the students, could not stop him from occasional laughter because of what the students said and wrote -not because of wanting to scorn them - rather because language was used in an unfamiliar and funny way. Of course, time was spent to let them know what exactly it is in their output that caused the laughter. Kramsch (1993, cited in Thanasoulas, 2001) explains such a situation as an instance of a clash of cultures (native and target), as a result of which meanings originally taken for granted are suddenly questioned and challenged. It is, in a sense, a reawakening experience leading one to have a second look at his culture in relation to the target culture. This, it is believed, often leads to a better understanding of ones culture too. The following areas consistently presented challenges in all classes handled.

3.1 House/Home

There is a difference in the concept of house/home as used in English in America and Kiswahili in East Africa. While it is right for any member of the family in western societies, for example in America, to talk about 'my house', the same is not true in Kiswahili and other Bantu languages. Probably because of the communal nature of life in such societies, in which most things are collectively owned, it is only the sole owners who can appropriately talk about 'my house' or any other property. This is usually the head of the household, who, in many African cultures, is the father. Only he can then talk about *nyumba yangu* (my

house). All the other members of the household would use *nyumba yetu* (our house). However, the other members of the household can use *nyumba yangu* when they build or acquire their own houses. This is in contradiction with what students in St. Lawrence University are used to, and as such they struggle with the difference. They always say, and write, their reference to *nyumba yangu* (my house) when in fact they mean their parents' house. Statements like these are very common:

6. (i) *Karibu kwa nyumba yangu kwa sikukuu ya Krismasi* (welcome to my house for Christmas).
   (ii) *Rafiki yangu alikuja kwa nyumba yangu* (my friend came to my house).

A related concept that could have been used to deal with the challenge described above is that of home, but it too is differently expressed in Kiswahili, and proves to be even more challenging to most learners. Kiswahili speakers and other African societies do make a distinction between a house/apartment and a home. A home, in that regard, is a dwelling place, which may consist of one or several houses. In Kiswahili it is called *nyumbani* (a home, also used to mean in the house because of the –ni suffix). Here too, it is only the head of the household who will talk about *nyumbani kwangu* (my home or at my home), with all the others using *nyumbani kwetu* (our home or at our home). Taking that into consideration, the two sentences above should have been:

7. (i) *Karibu nyumbani kwetu kwa sikukuu ya Krismasi* (welcome to our home for Christmas) or
   Karibu nyumbani kwa sikukuu ya Krismasi (welcome home for Christmas).

   (ii) *Rafiki yangu alikuja nyumbani kwetu* (my friend came to our home) or
   Rafiki yangu alikuja nyumbani (my friend came home).

This is confusing and may look overwhelming to the learners at first. However, if we want to learn the language and use it appropriately, as used in its culture, we have to strive to master the differences. Textbooks are important tools in clarifying these differences but, unfortunately, this is not given a lot of attention by most of them. There is very little mention of it in Hinnebusch and Mirza (1998) and Mugane (1999), while Senkoro (2003: 101) fails to mention that fact in his cultural notes on housing and accommodation and proceeds to fall in the same trap in *Zoezi la 5* (exercise 5): "Describe your house to your colleague, then exchange roles and let your colleague describe his/her house to you" (Senkoro, 2003: 101). Muaka and Muaka (2006: 46) do accord it a one paragraph explanation in their cultural notes.

3.2 Locatives

Locatives presented a major problem to all the students, most probably also because of the difference in the way they are expressed in English. Hinnebusch and Mirza (1998), Mugane (1999), and Senkoro (2003) all discuss it in a fair amount of detail. Senkoro (2003), for instance, clearly indicates that while in English is/are is utilized for both the state of being and being at a place, the situation is different in Kiswahili. In Kiswahili, the latter is expressed using *'po-ko-mo'* locatives forms from classes 16, 17, and 18 of the Kiswahili noun class system. Despite an attempt to go through the differentiation over and over again, this has continued to be a big problem for learners of Kiswahili as a foreign language. Failing to distinguish between the two, many often use *'ni'* (is) in place of *'po-ko-mo'*. Moreover, those who seem to have mastered the distinction run into the trouble of mixing the uses of *'po-ko-mo'*. Here are some examples:

8. (i) *Melina **ni** mbele ya Kaia* (Melina is infront of/ahead of Kaia).
   (ii) *Vitabu **ni** chini ya kitanda changu* (the books are under my bed).
   (iii) *Mombasa **ni** kwa pwani ya Kenya* (Mombasa is in the Kenyan coast).

In the above statements 'ni', is/are (being in a state) has been used instead of *po-ko-mo'* (being in/on/at a place). The correct statements should have been:

9. (i) *Melina **yuko** mbele ya Kaia* (Melina is infront of/ahead of Kaia).
   (ii) *Vitabu **viko** chini ya kitanda changu* (the books are under my bed).
   (iii) *Mombasa **iko** pwani ya Kenya* (Mombasa is in the Kenyan coast).

The difference in meaning that can result from the misuse of these is illustrated by the following two statements:

10. (i) *Baba yangu **ni** nyumba* (my father is a home).
    (ii) *Mwalimu **ni** ofisi* (the/a teacher is an office).

Obviously these students did not mean to say what they did. Most likely, what they meant was:

11. (i) *Baba yangu **yuko** nyumbani* (my father is at home).
    (ii) *Mwalimu **yuko** ofisini* (the/a teacher is in the office).

3.3 The Preposition *Kwa*

Although a number of prepositions have emerged as grey areas, mainly because of their varied uses, this analysis will be confined to *kwa* which seems to be most problematic. *kwa* has many uses, and translates to: **by**, **in**, **at**, **to**, and **for**. Armed with the knowledge that *kwa* can be used to express prepositional phrases in English, learners use it indiscriminately, as they would use **by**, **in**, **at**, **to**, and **for**

in English. There are certain contexts, however, in which *kwa* fails to meet the communication needs when other factors are not taken into account. These arise because of the cultural foundations of the two languages. These examples will illustrate:

12. (i) *Niliendesha kwa nyumbani.*
What was intended here is, I drove to 'my house' or I drove home, but the statement implies I drove at home which, though possible, is not usual.
(ii) *Rafiki yangu anataka kwenda kwa Afrika Mashariki*
(My friend wants to go to East Africa).

In the two examples, *kwa* has been used for 'to'. What was not considered, though, is the fact that in Kiswahili *kwa* is not used, on its own, with a number of verbs in reference to motion or movement towards something/someone. As a result, we don't travel (safiri), drive (endesha), run (kimbia), and walk (tembea) to, rather we use: *Kwenda*-to go, *kuelekea* -towards, *mpaka*-up to or *hadi*-until. Any of these could have been used in sentence (i) above, while for sentence (ii), *kwa* would not be necessary as it is implied in *kwenda.*

Also, in English, we speak or talk to someone but in Kiswahili we talk or speak with someone. Because of such a minor looking difference a number of statements made by learners end up being incorrect. Consider this: *Ninafikiri unahitaji kusema* ***kwa*** *mama yangu!* This translates to 'I think you need to talk at my mother'. The right expression is *Ninafikiri unahitaji kusema* ***na*** *mama yangu.*

Another concern with the use of *kwa* is evident in its use for **for** of English.

13. (i) *Katika Afrika hakuna umeme au maji* ***kwa*** *kunywa!* (in Africa there is no electricity or water for drinking/drinking water).
(ii) *Unaweza kununua vitu* **kwa** *jiko lako pia...* (you can buy utensils for your kitchen too).
(iii) *Nitapika chakula cha jioni* ***kwa*** *wageni wangu* (I will cook dinner for my visitors).
(iv) *Nilisoma* ***kwa*** *mtihani* (I studied/read for the test).

The meaning of *kwa* in the examples given is at, and not for. In these cases, **for** should have been expressed using the associative *–a*, hence: *Katika Afrika hakuna umeme au maji* ***ya*** *kunywa; Unaweza kununua vitu* ***vya*** *jiko lako pia* or, as in the case of (iii) and (iv), by the verbal extention *–ia* and *–ea* respectively to get *Nitapikia wageni wangu chakula cha jioni, and Nilisomea mtihani.*

3.4 Right word wrong meaning

Another big challenge to students has to do with determining the right words to use to express something, especially when confronted with words that have different meanings in their culture and the target culture or when, having looked up and found proper translations in dictionaries, they fail to take into account the context of usage especially in situations where a word has more than one meaning. As a result, they come up with words erroneously utilized, at times making no sense at all. Several such situations were encountered, as these few examples will show.

14. *Nilipofanya kazi nilishughulika sana na* ***niliokoa*** *kununua vitabu vya shule, kwa sababu vitabu ni bei ghali sana* (I worked very hard when I had a job and saved to buy books because they are very expensive).

A very good sentence whose only problem is a wrong use of the word *okoa* as translated from 'save'. *Okoa* means save but only in the sense of rescue or in the religious salvation. When talking about keeping something for future use the Swahili word, which would have been appropriate in the sentence, is *weka akiba* or *dunduiza*.

In English the word fight is used to mean both being at war, involving physical confrontation, as well as quarrelling or arguing involving a heated exchange of words. In Kiswahili, the latter is *kugombana, kubishana or kubabakana*. It is only in the former that the word *kupigana* (to fight) is employed. Many a time, though, Kiswahili learners use *kupigana* in reference to the latter. St. Lawrence University students were once showed a video of *vitimbi* (a popular Kenyan television comedy program) and asked to write a summary of the show. In the opening scene, two characters were arguing, a situation captured thus:

15. *Filamu ilianza na mwanaume na mke wake, walikuwa wakipigana.*
To a Swahili speaker, this would imply that the two were involved in a physical confrontation with a danger of bodily harm, whereas in fact they were just having an exchange of words in an argument.

In the Kiswahili and most other African cultures, a man marries and a woman is married, and as such there are two different verbs to describe that. For Kiswahili, the term for marry is *oa* (the man) and get married, *olewa* (the woman). This distinction is problematic as it is not the case in most of the western cultures. Consequently, when students say; *dada yangu* ***alioa*** *mwaka jana* (my sister married last year), instead of *dada yangu* ***aliolewa*** *mwaka jana* (my sister got married last year), there is a contradiction of some sort. Other words

commonly used in wrong contexts include: *legeza (relax), choka (be tired),* and *vunjika (be broken).* Here is an elaboration:

16. *Ulilegeza wikendi hii? (*did you relax this weekend?)
While *legeza* means relax in English, it carries a different meaning in Kiswahili. *Legeza* would be appropriate, for example, when dealing with something that was tight and needs to be loosened, or if one has a hard stance on an issue, then "legeza" is appropriate for relaxing the tight grip or the hard stance. However, for relax to mean resting, the right Kiswahili word is "pumzika", hence the question above would be: *Ulipumzika wikendi hii?*

17. *Nililala kwa sababu nilichoka* (I slept because I got tired)
The verb tire/be tired is used in English for both exhaustion or loss of energy and feeling sleepy, but in Kiswahili it is mainly used for the former. Consequently, whereas it is true that one may get sleepy due to being tired, the appropriate verb should have been *kusikia/kuhisi usingizi* (to feel sleepy).

While it is in order to say that something broke (is broken) in English that is not common in Kiswahili, which instead talks about something being or getting spoilt. This difference is quite evident in the Kiswahili classroom. Students would come up with sentences like:

18. *Wakati tukisafiri kutoka Nairobi kwenda Amboseli, lori letu lilivunjwa/vunjika mara mbili (*When we were traveling from Nairobi to Amboseli, our lorry broke down twice).

In a normal situation one will want to find out who broke the lorry, using what because breaking carries a different meaning. Instead, one would have expected the students to use the equivalent of: ...the lorry got spoilt or broke down twice. Consequently, the right Kiswahili construction to indicate that it broke down is *liliharibika mara mbili.* As such, the following statements, found in Lioba Moshi's students' workbook *Mazoezi ya Kiswahili, Kitabu cha Wanafunzi wa Mwaka wa Kwanza (Swahili Exercises, A Workbook for First Year Students (1988)* are incorrect:

19. (i) *Sina motokaa leo kwa sababu imevunjika* (pg. 83).
(ii) *Gari langu limevunjika* (pg. 84).

Instead, *vunjika* should be replaced with *haribika* (break down, get spoilt, be in bad condition).

The Kiswahili word for visit is *tembelea.* However, whereas in America people visit with, in the East African context, people simply visit, as the former would mean we and others visited somebody else. So we don't have visited with (*kutembelea na)* but simply *kutembelea. Wikendi nilitembelea na wazazi wangu*

(I visited with my parents over the weekend), would be incomplete for it implies that the speaker, together with his/her parents visited a third party. We will, therefore, wait to be told who was visited in this case. The correct way to render this is by saying; *wikendi nilitembelea wazazi wangu* (I visited my parents over the weekend).

There are several other areas that appear to be challenging to students as a result of the differences between the two languages, as well as cultural differences in the use of English in the American society and Kiswahili in the East African societies. Such areas include, but are not limited to: telling time, expressing dates, expressing the date of birth and one's age, and question words, especially *lini* (when), *nani (who)* and *wapi* (where).

4.0 Conclusion

Since the principal reasosns for teaching foreign languages include the need to assist learners better understand their cultures as well as the target cultures, paying more attention to the fact that they are different, and less to the stereotypes that the other is inferior (Thanasoulas, 2001); and the need to equip the learners with the ability to function and do business in the target comuunity, it follows that we cannot at any one time lose sight of the cultural differences in the two cultures involved. The observations presented above clearly show that without such considerations, the linguistic knowledge attained would be very inadequate. As we make learners aware of the cultural differences in the two societies, we must at the same time encourage them to note, not only the different practices, but also the different ways that they are expressed in language. It is, therefore, not enough to know that in the African culture, a woman is normally married while a man marries without taking cognizance of the way the two are expressed in the language.

Negotiation of meaning, defined by (Savingnon, 1983, cited in Kramsch and Thorne, 2002) as "a process whereby a participant in a speech event uses various sources of information-prior experience, the context, another participant- to achieve understanding" is critical in developing communicative competence. Instructors and other students in the classroom often form the only participants in a learner's initial encounter with the language. As we negotiate meaning in class, the information we give to assist learners understand the language is significant, and cultural information must be part of it. It is obvious that learnres will initially be tempted to apply the lingusitic and cultural knowledge of their L1 to the L2, and that overcoming that is a major challenge, but given the importance of

understanding the difference, we cannot afford to allow meaning to be misrepresented by falling back to our L1 knowledge for convenience.

This paper has shown that indeed, English L1 linguistic and cultural knowledge comes into play in the learning of Kiswahili L2 language and culture in US universities; that despite some of these issues being explicitly covered in language textbooks, the learners still find it challenging to master the different ways of expressing things otherwise common to them. Although the paper has also shown which particular areas are challenging most learners, it has not been able to provide a clear statement on how to tackle the challenges, and that, it is hoped, should be the immediate concern to be turned to by all Kiswahili language instructors. It is a subject that requires further inquiry.

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