

**SPEECH ACCOMODATION STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY MIRAA TRADERS OF
IGEMBE AND SOMALI ORIGIN**

BY

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims at shedding light on the linguistic accommodation strategies employed by miraa traders of Igembe and Somali origin in their business endeavors. The discourse emanating from the miraa traders is characterized by peculiar language usage hence attracting the attention of scholars. These traders come from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The study used Communication Accommodation Theory was carried out at Muringene Market and in Maua Town. The social network approach was used in identification of the participants while purposive sampling procedure was used in obtaining the data from the participants. The data used in this study was collected by tape-recording the traders as they did their negotiations as well as through non-participants observation. Data analysis was to a largely qualitative. The study found out that miraa traders accommodate one another through convergence and divergence.

Key words: miraa traders, convergence, divergence, accommodation, strategies.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The prime concern for this study was to analyse the various ways that Miraa traders from Igembe and Somali origin linguistically accommodate one another as they carry out their business. It is therefore a sociolinguistic study that analysed the Miraa traders' discourse in an endeavour to find out how these traders from the two distinct communities converge and diverge in their speeches. Miraa is a crop that is grown in large scale in Igembe region in Meru County in Kenya (Kobia and Miriti 2014). Meru county has nine sub counties; Imenti North, Imenti South, Imenti Central, Buuri, Tigania West, Tigania East, Igembe North, Igembe South, Igembe Central. Although miraa is grown in most parts of Meru County, it is largely grown in Igembe Central, Igembe North and Igembe South sub counties hence making the three sub counties the center for miraa business where most of the negotiations are carried out. (Kobia and Miriti 2014) The key players in the miraa

business are the traders from Meru and Somali communities. The negotiation is made in various markets in Igembe South, North and Central sub-counties.

It is also worth to note that the transactions can be made among Igembe traders themselves or among Igembe traders and Somali traders. When the negotiations are among the Igembe traders themselves, the language of interaction is Kigembe dialect of Kimeru language but when the transaction is between traders of Igembe origin and those of Somali, the language of interaction is Kiswahili (Kobia and Miriti 2014)

1.2 Statement of the problem

People from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds interact in their endeavor to pursue their myriad social, economic and political aspirations and in the process, they device numerous techniques of accommodating one another linguistically. Scholars have done studies on speech accommodation in divergent contexts involving varied participants. However, little has been done as far as business discourse involving Miraa traders of Igembe and Somali origin is concerned. Therefore, this study aimed at analyzing the business discourse stemming from miraa traders of Igembe and Somali origin in an attempt to find out the various ways these traders linguistically accommodate one another in their speeches as they pursue their business undertakings at Muringene market and Maua town.

1.3 Research Objectives.

This study will be guided by the following objective;

To explain the various ways in which miraa traders from Igembe and Somali origin linguistically accommodate one another as they do their business.

1.4 Research Questions.

The study will be guided by the following research question;

What are the various ways in which miraa traders from Igembe and Somali origin linguistically accommodate one another as they do their business?

1.5 Review of related Literature

Using the framework of Communication Accommodation Theory by Giles (1973), linguists have carried out several studies on linguistic accommodation focusing on different areas of concern. These studies have also been carried out in different contexts such as hospitals, banks, schools, markets just but to mention a few. The current study was carried out in a market set up and focused on the speech accommodation strategies employed by miraa traders of Igembe and Somali origin. In this section, a few studies in these areas of concern are reviewed.

The main tenets and strategies that underlie Communication Accommodation Theory include: convergence and divergence. Convergence is the strategy in which individuals adapt to each other's communicative behaviors in terms of a wide range of linguistic-prosodic-nonverbal features including speech rate, pausal phenomena, and utterance length, phonological variants, smiling, gaze

and so on (Giles et al.,1991). Convergent linguistic behavior demonstrates a greater solidarity and reduced social distance hence achieving social approval or acceptance (Giles and Ogay, 2006). Divergence, on the other hand, is when the interactants accentuate on their speech and nonverbal differences and display their reduced solidarity and greater social distance (Scissors et al 2009). Mutual convergence can foster communicative innovations at the lexical, grammatical, prosodic, and nonverbal levels, which may serve to enhance shared couple and family identities as well as small- group identities (Giles et al 1991) in Sabater (2015). The current study focused on the different ways in which convergence and divergence is realized by miraa traders as they interact with one another in their business.

Speech convergence and divergence can be demonstrated empirically by linguistic indicators such as language, (St Clair and Giles 1979), pronunciation (Giles, 1973), dialect (Russell 1982, Trudgil, 1986,) speech rates (Webb, 1970) pause and utterance length (Giles and St Clair 1979; 48), Vocal intensities (Natale, 1975). All these studies used the CAT tenets to analyze their data. This study also used communication Accommodation Theory tenets and focused on aspects such as language, accent, non verbal features and pronunciation, to investigate how miraa traders accommodate one another.

Ishak and Rafik- Galea (2015) analysed the speech accommodation strategies in the selling of life insurance. The researcher found out that convergent and divergent strategies are used. The researcher noted that three accommodation strategies are commonly found in their conversations; evoking addressee's social approval (convergence), promoting communicative efficiency between interlocutors (convergence), and maintaining a positive social identity (divergence). Similarly, this study sought the ways in which traders accommodate one another in their speeches as they carry on with their business.

People involved in business undertakings mostly find themselves seeking each others' approval in order to achieve communicative efficiency. Rogerson-Revell (2010) in Ishak and Rafik- Galea (2015) note that participants in international business meetings were aware of the need to adjust their language to suit the needs of a diverse international audience and to accommodate where necessary. Similarly, Campbell and Davis (2006, p47) argue that the way sales representatives employ strategies in overcoming objections have an effect on their ability to close a sale. The aforementioned findings seem to coincide with what happens in miraa business where traders try as much as possible to appear alike in order to transact with ease.

Sweeney and Hua (2010) studied how native speakers of English accommodate their non native counterparts in intercultural negotiations. The findings revealed that the native speakers employed a variety of linguistic devices than non native speakers. In miraa business both parties strive to accommodate one another so as to reach a compromise price easily.

Giles has studied the interaction of young and elderly persons in business settings using Communication Accommodation as a theoretical framework. Findings demonstrated that elderly

persons tend to be less accommodating than their younger counterparts. While several other factors came into play, convergence and divergence portions of this theory were used in interpreting and explaining this phenomenon (McCann, & Giles 2006). This study dwelt with traders who were tried to converge in their speeches and incidences of divergence were not as many compared those of convergence.

In addition, Giles has also looked at the actions and attitudes in the public's interaction with police officers, using Accommodation theory. Relational and identity aspects of this theory help to demonstrate interaction patterns that exist between the public and the police in the various situations that these interactions take place (Giles, et al. 2005.) This study by Giles *ibid* also looked at both the accommodation patterns of the officers and the public with whom they were dealing with. The current investigation used Communication Accommodation Theory to account for the ways in which miraa traders converge or diverge in their speech bearing in mind that these traders are diverse with regard to their cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Giles (1973) in UC Berkeley Phonology Lab annual Report (2009) demonstrated the saliency of accommodation in interactions by investigating whether interviewees would converge their speeches towards an interviewer for social approval. The findings revealed that the interviewees converged their speech towards their interviewer suggesting that the desire for social approval is a salient motivation for convergence towards an authoritative figure while Eckert (1989) in UC Berkeley Phonology Lab annual Report (2009) studied linguistic variation and found out that speakers try to assert their distinctiveness from each other through their linguistic practices. Similarly, Giles et al (1991) posits that in many cases divergence from an exterior category signifies an in-group commonality. They suggest that divergence can be a tactic of intergroup distinctiveness of individuals in search of a positive social identity. The current study indicated that traders sought social approval through the choices of words made, using high intonation as well as using a common language with some accent inclined to Kisomali language.

1.6. Theoretical framework

This study employed communication accommodation theory in its theoretical framework. Particularly, it made use of the Immediate Situation tenet and Similarity-Attraction Theory. Below is the postulation of the theory.

1.6.1 Communication Accommodation Theory.

Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) stemmed up from Speech Accommodation Theory. Communication Accommodation Theory, which was developed by Howard Giles (1973), explains some of the cognitive reasons for code-switching and other changes in speech as individuals seek to emphasize or minimize the social differences between themselves and their interlocutors. Giles posits that when speakers seek approval in a social situation they are likely to converge in their speech to that of their interlocutor. This can include, but is not limited to the language of choice, accent, dialect and paralinguistic features used in the interaction. In contrast to convergence, speakers may also engage in divergent speech. In divergent speech, individuals

emphasize the social distance between themselves and their interlocutors by using linguistic features characteristic of their own group. This study investigated the ways in which traders converged or diverged in their speech during the negotiation process and what motivated them into doing so.

1.6.2 Convergence and Divergence

Communication Accommodation Theory has convergence and divergence as some of the major tenets. The two are the basic aspects of the immediate situation which is one of components of Communication Accommodation Theory. The current study will make use of the two tenets to account for the ways in which traders from different ethnic backgrounds accommodate one another during the process of negotiation.

Convergence describes the processes whereby individuals shift their speech styles to become more like that of those with whom they are interacting. In other words, convergence describes how an individual shifts his speech patterns in various interactions so that they more closely resemble the speech patterns of his interlocutor(s). These language shifts include features such as phonetic changes such as changing pitch and prolonging pauses. The researcher used this tenet to show the ways in which miraa traders converged in their conversations.

On the other hand, divergence is a linguistic strategy whereby a member of a speech community accentuates the linguistic differences between his in-group and the respective out-group of his interlocutor in order to preserve his positive in-group identity, rather than accentuating in-group similarities as in convergence. The speaker from the in-group will emphasize in-group speech characteristics in order to index his in-group status to his interlocutor(s). The basic idea behind similarity-attraction theory is that the more similar our attitudes and beliefs are to others; the more likely it is we will be attracted to them.

It is explicit from the above argument that this study found immediate Situation and similarity Attraction tenets of Communication Accommodation Theory by Giles (1973) being applicable and informative hence making use of it. Immediate Situation has two components; convergence and divergence that were emphasized to show how traders accommodate one another.

1.7 Research Methodology

The research used qualitative research design. Qualitative research includes designs, techniques and measures that do not produce discreet numerical data, Mugenda and Mugenda (1999). Qualitative approach was employed to describe how traders from the two communities accommodate one another.

The study was conducted in Maua town and at Muringene market. Ten negotiations recorded from Maua town and ten negotiations recorded from Muringene market were used. This implies that twenty negotiations were recorded from both places. Ten negotiations involved negotiations between Igembe and Somali traders while other ten were between Igembe traders themselves.

From the two sets of negotiations recorded, the researcher investigated the ways in which the traders accommodate one another. This sample gave sufficient data since most of the traders exhibit similar features. Milroy (1987) observes that large samples are not necessary for linguistic surveys

because they tend to be redundant, bringing data handling problems with diminishing analytical returns. The study employed purposive sampling technique. It is through this technique that the researcher got samples from the two categories- negotiations between traders from Somali origin and Igembe and between traders from Igembe origin themselves. Purposive sampling enabled the researcher identify the right samples from the two categories.

Data was collected by use of a powerful small tape recorder. This means that the researcher used audio recording to obtain the verbal data. Through non-participant observation, the researcher was able to account for such things as tone and intonation, gestures and facial expressions among other non verbal and paralinguistic features. In addition, the researcher used a note book to note down anything observed that was related to the study. To ensure that the data obtained through recording was free from biases, the researcher employed the social network approach so as to create confidence between the researcher and the informant. The informant was approached in the capacity of a friend. This minimized the observer's paradox because it built trust with the respondents. It also increased the chances of observing in a prolonged informal interaction without suspicion (Milroy 1987:35).

By use of social network approach, the researcher was introduced to twenty traders. It is from these traders that the recording plus the observations were done. For the two markets, the same procedure was followed.

Recording was done after relatively close relationship had developed between the researcher and the informants in their network groups. This was after the researcher had established a considerably close link with the network group that exists on the basis of business they do, and the friendship that has developed in the process of carrying out their daily job-business. This ensured that the conversations collected were as natural as possible and carried in a relaxed atmosphere. A non participant observation was undertaken. The traders especially the sellers were aware that they were being observed because they had already been introduced to the researcher through a friend of a friend. Milroy (1987:60) notes that in non participant observation, the researcher is an outsider in language use and passively observes and makes notes on language use. The information on the ways in which the traders accommodate each other were got from the negotiations recorded and the notes made from the observation.

Each of the conversations recorded took about ten minutes. The respondents were made aware that their speeches were being recorded but the researcher was to determine when to begin the recording. It has been observed that people do not remain conscious for long even when they are aware that their speech is being recorded Kanana (2003) in Muthwii (1994). It is also imperative to note that although the respondents were aware that they were being recorded for the researcher to get data for research, they did not know exactly what the researcher was interested in. This ensured that the respondents conducted themselves in a natural way. The researcher was accompanied by another person who had some technical skills in tape recording to assist in the same. The researcher, who was engaged in a non participant observation, was also observing while taking notes that were used in the analysis.

The data was analyzed using qualitative approach to data analysis. The first step was to transcribe the tape recorded data on paper. The tape recorded data was then summarized and described using

descriptive statistics to communication strategies used by traders to accommodate one another. The notes made by the researcher from the observation were availed at this stage to supplement the recorded data. The qualitative approach was then used to describe the ways in which traders accommodate one another. The analysed data on the ways in which traders from different communities accommodate one another was described qualitatively.

1.8 Data analysis.

This study sought to analyze the accommodation strategies using the framework of Communication Accommodation Theory to analyze the data. This section gives an account of the convergence and divergence strategies which form the essential tenets of the theory.

1.8.1 Speech Convergence.

Communication Accommodation Theory by Giles et al (1979) accounts for the motivations underlying language switching in people's speech during an interaction by making their speech styles more or less similar to that of their interlocutors.

Speech convergence is whereby individual speakers use the language that the hearer knows or likes best. Speakers converge when they desire social integration and approval with other people. This may be done consciously or unconsciously (Giles and St. Clair, 1979; Giles et al; 1982; Russell, 1982).

The Similarity Attraction Theory, which is a subset of Speech Accommodation Theory, proposes that the more similar our attitudes and beliefs are to certain others, the more likely it is we will be attracted to them. The Social Exchange Theory (SET), a sub set of Communication Accommodation Theory, on the other hand, states that prior to acting, people weigh the potential costs and rewards and thus choose the alternative that maximizes the positive outcome. In our data, it was observed that traders tried as much as possible to be alike in order to come to a compromise in price. One of the motivating factors was to make a transaction- to buy at a reduced price for the buyers and to sell at a high price for the sellers so as to maximize their profits.

Example

This was a negotiation between a Somali trader as a buyer and an Igembe one as a seller.

- B: T1 Wewe Waria uza miraa. (You Waria, sell this miraa.)
 S: T2 Unataka miraa ipi wewe Waria? (Which type of miraa do you want Waria?)
 B: T3 Nataka hiyo leta miraa wewe. (I want that one, you bring that miraa.)
 S: T4 Leta pesa wewe Waria. (Waria, let me have the money.)
 S: T5 Reka na mukundo yuu. (Leave this mukundo (insult alone).
 B:T6 Nitachapa wewe iko na matusi. (I will beat you because you are insulting.)

- S:T7 Hapa bwana ni kwetu. (This is our home.)
- B:T8 Wewe ni jinga ya Meru. Funga miraa vizuri.
(You are a fool from Meru. Pack miraa properly.)
- S:T9 Leta elfu moja mia moja wewe Waria. (Give out eleven hundred shillings Waria.)
- B: T10 Chukua pesa yako na ulete miraa yangu. (Take your money and bring my miraa.)

It is evident from this negotiation that the use of abusive language is not a big issue for both traders from the two communities. In the conversation, the second seller from Igembe abuses the Somali trader in Kimeru in T5 and the Somali trader realizes. Although he threatens to beat him in T6, he is not serious because the next thing he does in T7 is to also insult the Igembe trader and then tells him to pack miraa properly. This therefore supports Similarity-Attraction Theory in that traders from the two communities try as much as possible to be similar in the way they talk to one another by for instance not minding when one party uses abusive language. It was also observed in this negotiation and several others that the traders spoke in high intonations and there were no pauses in the interaction process.

The fact that these traders were speaking in Kiswahili, is an indicator that they were converging in their speeches so as to interact and negotiate meaningfully. If the Igembe traders remained faithful to their language and so did the Somali traders, then no negotiation would have taken place. On the contrary, miraa traders tried as much as possible to communicate in Kiswahili; even those who had difficulties in doing so on account of limited knowledge in the language, spoke in broken Kiswahili. This was the case except where they wanted to exclude one another. All these attempts to speak in Kiswahili were geared towards convergence in their speech.

On the same note, it was also found out that the Igembe traders sometimes spoke in Kiswahili that had an accent similar to that of Somali and assumed positive politeness. It was also observed that miraa traders from both communities spoke in high intonation and used some words like Waria or Mureme to refer to one another in the process of interaction. Mureme is a Kimeru word which is used in general terms to refer to a man of Meru origin while Waria is a word used generally to refer to a person whose origin is Somali. These words were used frequently and play a pertinent role in assisting these traders to identify with one another by converging. When a Somali trader uses the word Mureme, he is attempting to identify with the Meru trader and so does the Meru trader when he uses the word Waria. The following example can clarify this assertion.

- B: T1 Habari Mureme, iko miraa. (Hi Mureme, do you have miraa.)
- S: T2 Miraa iko mzuri sana. (Points at some bunches, picks and gives him) hii elfu tatu Waria (I have the best miraa. This one is going at three thousand Waria.)
- B: T3 Waria iyo pesa nyingi sana, napea wee ngiri mbili. (That is too much waria, I will buy at two thousand shillings.)
- S: T4 Iyo iwezi, ngiri mbili mia tano na usiongee. Wewe ni kastoma yangu Waria. (That is not enough to buy that miraa, pay two thousand five hundred for it and do not complain. You are my customer Waria.)

B: T5 Sawa funga haraka. (It is okay, pack it very fast.)

In T1, Somali trader calls the seller Murume which is a Kimeru word and in T3 he calls him Waria which is Somali word. In T4, the seller calls the buyer Waria. By so doing, the traders are trying to converge in their speeches.

It is therefore clear from our analysis that despite the fact that miraa traders come from distinct linguistic and cultural backgrounds, they were found to share so many things in common. They for instance insult or use abusive language, exhibit high intonation, employ positive politeness and both are rude and arrogant.

1. 8.2 Speech Divergence

As much as the traders try to converge in their speeches, they also find themselves diverging. This was especially so with the Igembe traders. Speech divergence is whereby the speaker tries to create distance between himself and the hearer by maximizing differences in language use. Speakers will therefore diverge to differentiate themselves from each other socially. Speech divergence is accounted for by Social Identify Theory of Communication Accommodation Theory which states that linguistic divergence primarily reflects motivations to assert positive ethno- linguistic identities with one group members or to show disapproval of them.

The findings of this study reveal that the Igembe traders mostly diverged in their speeches so as to exclude their Somali counterparts. They did so especially when they wanted to signal something negative on the side of Somali traders. Some other times, they did so as a way of showing disapproval towards the Somali traders. The examples given below can shed more light on this phenomenon.

EXAMPLE 1

B: T1 Wewe waria uza miraa (You sell miraa Waria.)

S: T2 Unataka miraa ipi wewe Waria. (Which type of miraa do you want Waria ?)

B: T3 Nataka hiyo leta miraa wewe. (I want that one bring that miraa.)

S:T 4 Leta pesa waria. (Waria give out the money.)

S2:T 5 (To another merian) Rekana na mukundo yuu wee. (Leave this mukundo (an insult referring to one's anus) alone.)

B:T 6 Nitachapa wewe iko na matusi. (I will beat you up because you are insulting.)

S: T 7 Hapa Maua ni kwetu bwana. (Maua is our home.)

B: T8 Wewe ni jinga ya Meru, funga miraa vizuri (You are a fool from Meru pack miraa properly.)

The above negotiation involved a trader of Somali origin and two traders of Igembe origin. The traders of Igembe origin diverged in their speech in order to exclude the Somali trade. The second seller insults the buyer in Kimeru in T5. He wants the first seller to stop selling

miraa to the Somali trader. The second trader disapproves of the Somali trader and therefore he uses Kimeru language to signal to the other one.

Example 2

This is a negotiation between Igembe traders as sellers and a Somali trader as a buyer.

B: T1 Wewe waria unalala hapa. Uza miraa (You Waria, are you are sleeping here? Sell miraa.)

S: T2 Wewe Waria ngoja miraa iko, nataka Kangeta, Kolombo? (You wait waria, miraa is there, and you want which type, Kangeta or Kolombo?)

B: T3 Waria wewe nataka miraa. (You waria, I want miraa.)

S: T4 (To another igembe trader) Thania mukundo you miraa we yutikira. (Give this mukundo (insult referring to one's anus) miraa, he will not keep quite.)

B: T5 Wewe chukua pesa. Unafikiri sina pesa ama nini wewe? (Have the money. You think I don't have money or what?)

S: T6 Leta pesa nzuri wewe Waria. Kwa sababu umezoea sana leta fifteen hundred. (Let me have good money waria. Let me have fifteen hundred because you are my customer.)

B :T7 Miraa quarter moja ndio hiyo pesa ama nini? Hiyo maneno yenu sitaitikia. Nyinyi wakora kwani mimi mgeni hapa?

(That is the money for one quota of miraa or what?)

I will not agree with you. You thugs, you think I am a visitor here?)

S: T8 Waria wewe wacha matusi wewe leta pesa. (You stop insulting Waria, let me have the money.)

B: T9 Unafikiri mimi pesa huwa ninaiba ama ni pirate? Mimi ni mtu ya Kenya. (You think I get my money through stealing or I am a pirate? I am a Kenyan.)

S: T10 Waria wewe tunajua mambo yako. Wewe ni pirate. (Waria we know much about you. You are a pirate.)

B: T11 Wewe fungua duka kama hauzi mira. (You close the premises if you are not selling miraa.)

S T12 Wewe Waria hapa Maua unajua ni kwetu? (Waria, do you know this Maua is our home?)

B: T13 Hiyo si shida wewe leta miraa. (That is not a problem let me have miraa.)

S: T14 Ongeza mia tano waria. Unanikazia pesa sana. (Add five hundred Waria. You are very stingy.)

B: T15 Wewe bwana leta miraa kwani pesa ni yako. (Bwana, let me have miraa, you think the money is yours.)

S: T16 Chukua miraa wewe Waria lakini ongeza hata pesa ya fegi bwana. (Take miraa bwana Waria but add at least some money to buy cigarettes.)

B: T17 Lete miraa yangu bwana wewe tumemalizana. (Let me have my miraa the deal is already over.)

The above was a negotiation between Meru traders as sellers and a Somali traders as buyers . The first Meru seller tells the second seller in T4 to give miraa to the Somali

trader. He disapproves of the Somali traders' impatience and then excludes him so as to give a reason to the other Meru trader for serving the Somali trader immediately. This exclusion of the Somali traders by Igembe ones was achieved through switching to a code (Kimeru) unfamiliar to them. Although the Somali trader tries to include himself in T7 by claiming that he is a Kenyan and neither is he a thief nor a pirate, the Igembe trader tries to distance himself further in T10 by insisting that the Somali trader is a pirate.

Conclusion.

Miraa traders converged and diverged in their speeches. They converged by mainly resulting to a common language (Kiswahili) on account of their divergence in their linguistic milieu. These traders did not only demonstrate resemblance in their pronunciation and usage of some words like Murume and Waria when referring to one another in general terms but also corresponded in their usage of abusive language as well as exhibiting high intonations and were also rude in their speech. They also adopted a similar accent when speaking in Kiswahili. Incidences of divergence in their speeches were also noted where Igembe traders resulted to their mother tongue (Kimeru) hence excluding their Somali counterparts.

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