

**A comparative linguistic approach to two urban youth codes in East Africa – Sheng and Lugha ya Mitaani – using an ecolinguistic framework**

Juliana França Macek

University of Sao Paulo - Brazil

*Starting from the fact that effects of globalization are in the first instance more perceptible in urban areas, we selected two East African towns with different historical and colonial background, Nairobi in Kenya and Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, as research areas for the study of discourse practices of a new social group that urbanization and globalization give rise in Africa - the urban youth. Like other African cities, both towns underwent rapid population growth in the past which implies a steady increase in language contact and multilingualism. Members of this distinct group are under pressure to create and establish their identity (mainly linguistically) in contrast to traditional schemes of identity and cosmopolitan Western style identities. As a result we see in both selected areas the emergence of new varieties that have been spread over large areas with no institutional or language-planning support, as it is the case of Sheng, in Nairobi, and Lugha ya Mitaani, in Dar es Salaam - they constitute youth (sub)culture and a way to construct youth identity in a Swahili context .*

*This paper presents a preliminary comparative analysis of Sheng and Lugha ya Mitaani using Haugen's (1972) ecology of language, or ecolinguistics, a concept that provides a lens through which to investigate a language's "interaction with other languages in the minds of bi- and multilingual speakers..." together with "its interaction with the society in which it functions as a medium of communication" (Haugen 1972:325), but also with its environmental set. In other words, it is a concept that focuses on examining holistically all factors that contribute to the rise and position of languages in the social environment, what we believe makes an ecolinguistic framework ideally suited to guide this study towards revealing the multiple inter-related factors that contribute to the emergence of these two varieties in order to answer the question whether the long term trend points to linguistic homogenization (the hegemonic role of English), or to the maintenance of linguistic diversity (characteristic of Africa), what in both cases we believe will lead to important evolutionary repercussions.*