

## MOMBASA'S SWAHILI-BASED 'COASTI SLANG' IN A SUPER-DIVERSE SPACE: LANGUAGES IN CONTACT ON THE BEACH

Nico NASSENSTEIN

*Institute for African Studies, University of Cologne*

**ABSTRACT** The Kenyan coast, already linguistically super-diverse, has witnessed the emergence of a new coastal language practice, 'Coasti Slang', which arose under conditions of 'partial acquisition' (cf. Lipski, 2002) of German as a Swahili-based genderized style among male multilingual sex workers. It was later adopted by others, who began to manipulate this language variety and expand their repertoires, turning the new style into a business language spoken along the waterfront. As it is currently used, Coasti Slang allows 'beach boys', beach vendors, hotel workers, sex workers and fishermen to deliberately conceal certain aspects of their communications for business purposes while integrating acquired terms from tourist languages (e.g., German, French, Italian) into this new fluid practice. Words from coastal Bantu languages have also entered the language, broadening the community of practice. Today, this language practice draws on speakers' indexical linguistic biographies, reflecting globalized creativity. Coasti Slang is thus neither a youth language nor merely a secret language, but a mobile and fluid practice that involves linguistic manipulation, originally linked to the gendered performance of linguistic masculinity among 'beach boys', and from then on increasingly used in coastal petty trade. The present paper is the first to shed light on the use of linguistic strategies in Coasti Slang, speakers' acquisition patterns and repertoires, the surrounding linguistic landscapes along the Kenyan coast, and the continued spread of this variety among speakers of all genders and professions.

**Key Words:** Genderization of style; Tourism; Super-diversity; Language biography; Kiswahili; Language contact; Youth language (practice).

### 1. INTRODUCTION: EMERGENCE AND CHANGING COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Coasti Slang has emerged over the last two or three decades as a new Swahili-based style used predominantly by young men in the tourist centers of coastal Kenya, particularly in Malindi and Mombasa. Speakers of Coasti Slang report that it initially drew heavily from Sheng (the youth language spoken in Nairobi, the Kenyan capital) as well as from local Mijikenda languages, especially Kigiryama and Chichonyi-Chidzihana-Chikauma (the Nyika-Taita group; see Lewis et al., 2014). Over time, with the increasing importance and growth of the tourist sector along the coast, the language evolved from a genderized style used by male sex workers into a trade language used in all businesses related to tourism. Whereas the community of practice (CoP) formerly consisted of male prostitutes, often serving as temporary 'boyfriends' to older European sex tourists, it currently consists of a community of young people, primarily made up of mobile beach

vendors, male and female sex workers, petty traders in the coastal villages (who sell fish, other food products and household equipment), artists and acrobats, hotel workers and fishermen.

Over time, Coasti Slang also expanded its lexical base, borrowing heavily not only from German but also from Italian and to some extent French; the choice of embedded language has depended upon the particular coastal strip and the nationalities of the tourists predominant on that beach. Hence, in and near beach areas primarily frequented by German and Swiss tourists—that is, in the area around Mombasa—the most common source of lexical input is German, whereas in other regions—mostly around Malindi—Italian reportedly serves as the lexical pool from which new lexemes are integrated into the language. In mixed beach areas such as Diani (south of Mombasa), where there are numerous French tourist groups, the lexical influence of French is at times apparent. Rather than positing several different varieties of Coasti Slang, however, it makes more sense to view it as a fluid linguistic practice that can be applied to any language that is predominant in a particular coastal area due to mobile patterns of tourism. Thus, Coasti Slang makes use of super-mobile linguistic resources whose trajectories and diffusion are linked to tourism, economic progress and cultural hybridity.

The impact of tourism on language change constitutes a new field of study, having so far been taken into consideration predominantly by Jaworski and Thurlow (2010) and by Phipps (2007). Using linguistic bits and pieces from European or African languages that particular tourists will presumably not understand (for instance, using French when dealing with Germans) is a technique often used to conceal meaning during petty trade transactions when discussing prices with colleagues, as one speaker explains (Wilson, January 2015):

If you're a German, we mix you with French words, so that you don't understand it. We normally do like that. It's a Swahili slang, but we mix with foreign words, which you don't understand.

This description captures the way in which Coasti Slang speakers construct an antagonistic multilingual self in contrast to a presumably monolingual Other (the European tourist). This has its roots in colonial ideologies (of one superior language as the linguistic basis of power) that persist in society, as will be discussed below. However, contrary to the assumptions of Coasti Slang speakers, it is most likely not the snippets of French that make their speech unintelligible to Germans, but elements taken from the Swahili or Giryama lexicon.

Coasti Slang can be viewed as a flexible pattern that adapts to its changing socioeconomic environment, rather than one that preserves specific linguistic forms. Its volatile character reflects the speaker community's mobile identity and ability to rapidly adapt to changing social conditions. As it is currently practiced, speakers draw on mobile linguistic resources that are available in order to (1) approach customers and do business, (2) enrich their repertoires, and thus, the degree of complexity of the language, which is then used as part of a trade practice of excluding a third party from understanding, and (3) to evoke interest by presenting oneself as a thrilling linguistic Other.

The paper is organized as follows: Sections 1.1–1.6 below deal with theoretical matters that describe the sociolinguistic setting in which Coasti Slang has emerged. Sections 2.1–2.4 contain examples from the data collected, organized in tables and in the form of glossed sentences (in all cases relating to the listed entries of the preceding table). Section 3 summarizes the conclusions based on these data and offers suggestions for future in-depth studies.

### 1.1 From performed 'linguistic masculinity' to the selling of seafood: The CoP

The origins of Coasti Slang must be understood as a reaction to the growing sex tourism sector on the Kenyan coast beginning in the late 1980s, when an increasing number of female sex tourists, primarily from Germany and Austria, but in later years also from Italy, France, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, engaged in short vacation liaisons with young male Kenyans working in or around the beach areas. The sex tourism industry has continued to increase over the years<sup>(1)</sup> and has made sex one of the bestselling services along the coast. According to an article exploring young Kenyans' perceptions of 'European sugar mamas', the chairman of the Mombasa Tourist Association estimates that every tenth tourist comes to Kenya comes in pursuit of sex (Mkenyaujerumani, 2012).

Many 'beach boys' began to acquire lexemes from their female Caucasian customers' repertoires, and used particularly vulgar or colloquial terms related to sex to create a super-masculine style, in contrast to the clearly feminizing treatment they received from these tourists. These snippets of German (such as *kubumsen* 'to fuck somebody (vulg.)', *kugeben* 'to give it to somebody') stood in clear contrast to the feminine beauty traits that most female customers sought in the young men. A particular feminine style (involving a certain style of dreadlocks, smoothly shaved skin with no body hair, metrosexual body care, tight clothes, jewelry) was, as several beach boys reported, favorable in the sex business along the coast; often (but not necessarily), this style was paired with traditional elements such as necklaces, or in the case of Maasai men, emblematic spears, sandals and ornamental hair accessories. Likewise, certain female customers wanted their long-term beach boys to follow these aesthetic guidelines or wished to impose them on their partners (Tela and Wilson, February 2015).

Motschenbacher (2010: 49) states that such a "linguistic genderization as style" or such "a genderlect is a stereotypical construct that must not be equalled with women's/men's speech behaviour and that, nevertheless, can be used in actual language behaviour to construct feminine/masculine identities." This style can therefore be seen as a construction that serves the social purpose of differentiation and as a linguistic means of restoring equilibrium to social imbalances. More than a mere 'genderlect,' Motschenbacher (2010: 50) sees such genderizing constructions in language as 'style' since they mark "an appropriate starting point for the description of linguistic gendering as a process of identity construction that may exhibit context-dependent intra-gender, and even intra-individual, diversity." As further pointed out by Lakoff (1979), genderized styles such as Coasti Slang are often based on stereotypes, which they embody and play with.

These remarks apply to Coasti Slang, which typifies a super-masculinity in which speakers, drinking heavily in popular beach bars, as often portrayed in Western movies, use a sexually loaded lexicon that includes a range of pejorative terms for women, and much more. In addition to the fact that beach boys often depend upon their customers' financial support, and must conform to their aesthetic expectations, these young men must also endure sexual dominance. Several Kenyan men who were interviewed for the Austrian movie "Paradies: Liebe" (Seidl, 2012) on sex tourism in Kenya reported that certain women enjoyed and demanded sexual practices that their male sex workers did not enjoy themselves, but agreed to engage in. Genderized styles such as Coasti Slang, which represents a linguistic reply to social gender constructions, can thus be seen as exemplifying one of "the variable ways in which people 'do' gender linguistically" (Motschenbacher, 2010: 51).<sup>(2)</sup> Similar patterns of creating gender through style have been reported by Mendoza-Denton (1996; 2008) for Latina gang girls in a Californian high school, where a "symbolic cosmetic system" marks genderized style and can be "read as unfeminine and threatening" (1996: 60) or, as Mendoza-Denton (1996) puts it, as *muy macha*.

At present, due to its exclusive symbolic nature among traders and workers along the waterfront, and the importance of its techniques of concealment for conducting business, Coasti Slang has developed into a widespread work language. Storch (2011: 62–75) offers an impressive framework for investigating 'secret manipulations' in African languages, providing analyses of secret languages all over the continent (including secret practices among speakers of Jukun, Lango, Fulfulde and other languages). These demonstrate the great variety, structural diversity and wide range of social functions of concealed languages in Africa. While the construction techniques of Coasti Slang are easy to acquire—requiring speakers to simply choose words from an enormous repertoire that customers do not understand—the aim of concealing meaning is successfully achieved in most cases. However, interlocutors must command similarly rich repertoires that serve as common ground. This limits the 'community of practice' (Eckert, 2000), i.e., the group of people who share social practices and who engage in a common endeavor, which in this case, involves business, or, as it is called in Coasti Slang, *geshaftimaken* [gəʃftɪmakən] (from German *Geschäfte machen* 'to do business').

When a group of German tourists is approached, a beach vendor or sex worker will first use German to chat, build a relationship and nurture a sense of trust. When multiple vendors discuss price reductions amongst each other, chat about sex business or criticize customers, this will be done in Coasti Slang. These interactions do not necessarily need to take place on the beach; they can also be carried out in the coastal villages, where the population is very heterogeneous, or even in the town of Mombasa. Speakers have provided examples in which women who were selling fish in the villages were approached by a younger man from the same village who asked *ni wiewiele* [vifi:lə] *hiyo samaki?* 'how much is that fish?'—derived from the German interrogative *wieviel* 'how much, how many.' One of them then replied, showing that she had understood and was part of the community,<sup>(3)</sup> *haha ni funftsish* [fynftsəʃ] 'here, this one is fifty'.—derived from Kigiryama *haha* 'here' and German *fünfzig* 'fifty'. This shows that in-group status

is negotiated through interactions involving this particular linguistic practice. This is why Coasti Slang was able to spread far into Giriama villages within a short time; as explained by one speaker, "even in the villages people have to know some foreign words" (Tela, January 2015).

Social parameters such as age, gender, ethnicity and social class no longer play a role in the formation of the community of practice (CoP), which is at present determined by trade practices. Anyone who is eager to do business will eventually learn Coasti Slang with the aim of becoming more competitive and able to deal with other businessmen and women; an impressive linguistic repertoire also serves as a rich linguistic garnish when interacting with potential customers. Among those not included in the community of practice are the authorities, hotel managers, businessmen and businesswomen working for large companies, Indian shop owners, and tourists. Hotel workers do not speak Coasti Slang when on duty because they intend to present themselves—as expressed by informants—in a "clear and grammar way" when it comes to their realization of Swahili. Nonetheless, they do understand Coasti Slang and will alter their language accordingly when interacting with beach vendors after hours. Samburu vendors and artists, who often dress and act as Maasai and are called (*ma-*)*hero* in Coasti Slang (as metonymously derived from the Maa greeting *ero suba*), are often not keen on learning or using Coasti Slang, as reported by several speakers.

While it may be possible for the customer to potentially understand certain words such as *kafrau* [kaɾawu:] 'woman' (from German *Frau*), *kaalte* [kaʔalte] 'old man/woman' (from colloquial German *Alte* 'wife, mistress') or *kufucki* [kufaki] 'to have sex' (from English *to fuck*), the entire meaning of the complex sentence cannot be decoded, either by Kenyan tourists to the coast (in Coasti Slang called *wakulima* 'farmers') or by German or Italian tourists, due to the components lacking in their respective repertoires.

Nairobians who come to the coast to work in tourism will be unable to comprehend the German, Italian or French lexemes in Coasti Slang, whereas tourists will be unable to decode the Swahili, Kigirya and Chichonyi words. Speakers assert that in most cases, they are able to determine whether inlander tourists coming to the coast speak Kikamba, Gikuyu, Luo or other languages by engaging in linguistic profiling and identifying their linguistic backgrounds by listening closely to their pronunciation of specific phonemes. For example, Kikamba speakers often realize Swahili *sasa* 'now' as [ʃaʃa], Gikuyu speakers often realize words such as *pilau* 'spiced rice dish' as [ɸirawu:] and Luo speakers tend to realize *shida* 'problem' as [sida]. Speakers then adapt their manipulation of slang according to the presumed repertoire of the customer, aligning with the person by addressing him/her in his/her own language, while also using other language forms as a means of concealing their communication with other vendors.

The fluid and flexible character of the language demonstrates that in-group knowledge, which in the case of Coasti Slang was initially limited to men who wished to emphasize a certain genderized style, can be difficult to contain. Moreover, in discussing secret languages, Thomason (1999: 31) states that, "the sim-

plicity of children's secret languages can't be maintained in a larger group". Hence, such languages inevitably undergo processes of semantic bleaching and, to some extent, lose their exclusivity. With respect to Mōkkī, an artificial jargon that was deliberately coined in the early 20th century in British India (present-day Pakistan), Thomason (1999: 31) notes one concealing linguistic practice that has "become stabilized and embedded in daily life [and] that [has become] a speech community's main language". Analogical examples include (1) the so-called Neger-Englisch variety (Grade, 1892) spoken on the West African coast during early colonial times, which then increasingly spread as a contact language, (2) the Kisetla language spoken in Kenya (Vitale, 1980), which was originally used only as a pidginized form of language among up-country settlers, and (3) youth language practices such as the German Kiezdeutsch (Wiese, 2012). All of these varieties existed for only a very short time as concealed languages within a small, defined community before becoming more widely spoken.

A similar fate may be predicted for Coasti Slang, since an increasing number of petty traders and beach workers are reportedly acquiring the slang with the aim of boosting their businesses. Among Swahili-based languages that make use of concealing strategies, Coasti Slang is unique. For example, Goyvaerts (1996) describes Kibalele as a secret language and work jargon among gangsters in Bukavu (DR Congo), which, like many other secret languages, was apparently based on phonological manipulations such as metathesis. A similar observation is made by Kutsch Lojenga (2009) for Kilungunya in Bunia (DR Congo), which also reveals a complex system of metathesis. While Kibalele, formerly spoken among criminal youth, appears to be extinct, Kilungunya is currently used in familial contexts, with different families in Bunia employing different concealing techniques. However, none of the other Swahili-based manipulative practices have come close to exhibiting the high degree of fluidity that is evident in Coasti Slang.

## 1.2 Power relations and speakers' agency

In addition to serving as a concealing technique for business-related communications, Coasti Slang as presently used also fulfils other social purposes. It can be seen as an interethnic bridge between members of diverging communities along the waterfront (for example, between the so-called Mijikenda, a group that includes Giriama and Digo businessmen who originate from the capital but have settled along the coast, and the Samburu people, who come to the coast and act and dress as Maasai warriors). Moreover, the use of Coasti Slang reflects linguistic agency and independence, representing a creative opposition to language policies and regulations that date back to colonial times, with their standards and differentiation of 'right' from 'wrong' language use.<sup>(4)</sup>

The community of practice is characterized by two commonalities: (1) Speakers take action rather than submitting to being ruled, thereby revealing a high degree of linguistic agency by creating something new out of a complex repertoire (cf. Lüpke & Storch, 2013), and (2) they reverse power hierarchies. Vendors, hotel staff and sex workers turn power relations around and begin to use the languages of the *maDeutsche* 'Germans', *maAmigo* 'Italians', *ma-King-George*

[makiŋɖɔɖɔɟi] 'British' and *maBonjour* 'French' in order to create a new practice that conceals meaning and plays with the languages of the intruding crowds. Beach vendors who speak fluent German are often regarded with suspicion by German tourists (in contrast to their French- or Italian-speaking colleagues). The vendors therefore show that they no longer depend upon limited notions of languages as stable entities (as perceived by German tourists with single-layered or less complex linguistic repertoires).

Instead, they consider the choice of conversing in German on the beach as one option among many others that include the use of Italian, French or even varieties of German such as *kiswisi* 'Swiss German' or deep *kijerumani* 'deep German' (referring to Bavarian dialects) to index certain emblematic words (by which potential tourists are then lured). This pool of linguistic resources and choices, as perceived by coastal speakers, can then be used as the basis for linguistic manipulation and the creation of a new complex practice such as Coasti Slang. This linguistic practice signals speakers' agency and their understanding of language as a pool of options rather than as fixed and cemented linguistic bricks. Knowledge of these linguistic resources (see Lüpke & Storch, 2013), along with a sense of agency in manipulating language (and tourists) in this way, serves as the underlying foundation for the creation of this new practice. Choosing the right words—whether German, Kigiryama or Sheng—in accordance with the conversational determinants is at the heart of the underlying principles of power and linguistic authority. Fluidity is the marker of Coasti Slang speakers' stability.

### 1.3 Prestige and attitudes

As a linguistic outlaw in a society that has been defined by the idealized standard of a Swahili that has rarely ever actually been spoken, Coasti Slang is a target for the negative language attitudes of purists. These include older coastal speakers, teachers, religious authorities and outsiders to the community who do not share the same practices. Coasti Slang is often labelled as 'language for the Gs',<sup>(5)</sup> 'language of the thugs [tagz]' or 'thug slang', terms that clearly reveal the negative views with which older and more traditional Swahili speakers regard this practice. Speakers themselves hold a very different view. As is common with any exclusive practice, a certain covert prestige associated with the language accrues to members of the in-group, which defines who is included or excluded from membership and confers linguistic rights upon members. Negative prestige thus shapes the boundaries of the community of practice.

As reported by speakers, people from the capital or other parts of the country who are not aware of this common practice come to the coastal areas and "are very surprised" (Wilson, January 2015) to hear *coastarians* (coastal inhabitants) converse in a language that includes lexemes that do not appear to belong to any of the surrounding African languages. However, in most cases—probably due to their lack of proficiency and understanding—they do not judge it as an inappropriate code. This is likely to be due to the diffusion of Sheng, Nairobi's former youth language and the current modern urban vernacular, which is wide-

spread across the nation. Most urban Kenyans are used to rapidly changing linguistic systems that emerge, breed and diffuse over a very short period of time.

#### 1.4 Speakers' repertoires and super-diversity

Repertoires can be defined, according to Gumperz (1972: 20–21), as the “totality of linguistic resources [...] available to members of particular communities.” This relates to Gumperz and Hymes' (1972) concept of ‘means of speaking’, which includes all styles, genres, languages, and fragments of words and expressions that a speaker has acquired during his/her lifespan and can make use of in specific situational contexts for social purposes. Lüpke and Storch (2013: 349) point out that a ‘repertoire’ is what “connects language with the social and the cultural, and at the same time with the individual”, suggesting that the common term ‘language’ no longer suffices when speakers' entire language biographies are indexically referred to, exposed and used in a linguistic utterance. Super-diverse contexts are, according to Blommaert and Backus (2011: 2), characterized by

(...) mobile subjects [who] engage with a broad variety of groups, networks and communities, and their language resources [that] are consequently learned through a wide variety of trajectories, tactics and technologies, ranging from fully formal language learning to entirely informal ‘encounters’ with language.<sup>(6)</sup>

In the case of Coasti Slang, it is evident that present-day speakers deliberately use the entire range of linguistic input to which they have access to create something new and innovative for the purpose of including others (i.e., other business-seeking colleagues), negotiating identity and in-group membership (with other group members), excluding others (i.e., potential targets and customers as well as individuals in official positions of power and those who sit at the top of social hierarchies), concealing meaning, and playing and impressing others (when approaching tourists, Nairobians and so on). The underlying condition of such play with repertoires is linguistic ‘super-diversity’, a concept formulated by Vertovec (2007). Vertovec addressed the various dimensions of social, religious, cultural and linguistic diversity in London, characterizing the complex, multilingual situation in the British capital as one of super-diversity, a scenario in which “the experiences, opportunities, constraints and trajectories facing new-comers—and the wider set of social and economic relations within the places where they reside—are shaped by complex interplays” (Vertovec, 2007: 1049). ‘Super-diversity’ describes a situation that surpasses anything that a particular locality has ever witnessed in terms of diversification. Super-diverse multilingual settings have been analyzed by Blommaert and Rampton (2011), with globalization playing an important role in their emergence (Blommaert, 2010).

While a globalized context serves as an important backdrop for Coasti Slang, knowledge of local language practices is the key to its deployment as a powerful tool. This knowledge is the underlying foundation of speakers' complex repertoires, as expressed by one speaker (Tela, January 2015):

Also, we can mix with local languages, Digo, Giriama. There are nine tribes in that one community and we understand each other. (...) Some, we mix some of the Giriama words in a sentence. It can mix with another word from Deutsche, with another word from Swahili. (...) And if you are a person from here, you will understand!

With respect to the acquisition of linguistic knowledge by those residing on the coast, Mijikenda inhabitants reveal a strong desire to actively acquire new languages in order to expand their repertoires. In several cases, tourists have been asked for books, printouts or handwritten notes by residents hoping to acquire the basics of a foreign language. Furthermore, Kenyan secondary schools throughout the Coast Province offer opportunities for students to enroll in German or French classes. Self-instruction manuals for German or French, *worterbooks* [wɔrtəbʊks] 'dictionaries, pocket guides' (from German *Wörterbücher*), are exchanged for handicrafts on the beach and constitute valuable goods that offer the promise of economic success. Hence, language learning is a prestigious and respected practice.

Rapidly spreading rumors regularly emerge along the beach when a new 'beach boy' (a label that subsumes all individuals who conduct business there) arrives who speaks a rare language such as Czech. A newcomer who possesses knowledge of a new language such as this automatically rises in prestige and authority, since he may be the one who "gets" (*atapata*, Swah.) all the Czech tourists. The same is true of a particular Russian-speaking beach boy along the southern beaches (Diani), who has apparently never achieved great financial success due to the limited number of Russians in the area. Vivid stories continue to circulate of the one speaker fluent in *kiswisi* (Swiss German) who would sell certain words to other beach boys, thereby peddling "socially relevant knowledge" (Lüpke & Storch, 2013: 8) linked to economic prospects. This, according to other speakers, occurred at a time when an increasing number of *Schwizerdütsch*-speaking tourists were populating the area. Reportedly, that speaker has since migrated to Switzerland, although it is unclear if the migration (in his colleagues' minds) is explained by his 'unique' language skills.

Coasti Slang speakers are very rapid learners not only of core language skills but also of knowledge of conversational practices in different languages such as Italian, German and French, as well as the cultural backgrounds related to these languages. Thus, when approaching tourists for business purposes, they not only choose a particular language from their repertoire but they also adjust their conversational patterns, as described by speaker Wilson (January 2015), who is fluent in French:

I learnt in school French, I know proverbs in French. When you tell these French people their proverbs, they are surprised. When you approach them, first of all, you ask permission. 'Excuse me... I hope I am not disturbing you? Allow me to present myself to you.' You just go for polite language, then they listen to you. Then you have [a] talk with them. Then they ask you 'what is your job here?' You can go for a long walk here, even without telling what you are doing, just normal stories, about what people are

doing in the country to make their living, then you can tell them what you are doing. (...) I speak with them fluent. After few meters, they will stand and look at you. ‘You have white woman?’ first question they will ask you. ‘You have white woman? You have been to France?’ ‘Non.’ ‘How did you know French?’ They are happy! (...) The Germans, they don’t care how we learnt the language, but French people they will ask you, how come you know their language. And here, we are not colonized by the French, we are Anglocone, but if they see you speaking Francophone, they are surprised. Not like German people; German people, they don’t do. But French, ah French... they ask many questions.

Speakers of Coasti Slang also mention that exceptionally good proficiency in German can be bad for business due to suspicion arising from German tourists’ notions of authenticity; the tourists may assume that the speaker has been expelled from Germany after having lived there for a long time and, thus, that he/she may have a criminal history. Because many German tourists have only very a basic knowledge of English, negotiations must take place in German. However, according to several speakers, German skills must be carefully deployed, a situation that greatly differs from the use of French (see above). In general, competence can be understood as a dynamic concept due to the fact that we never repeat and reproduce the same linguistic experience a second time (Blommaert & Backus, 2011: 8). Apparent competence can also be signaled by a speaker who uses certain emblematic markers to make the listener think that his conversational partner possesses strong competence of the language. This can be used to gain in-group access or to distance oneself from other groups.

The statement reproduced above indicates that Coasti Slang speakers often master conversational styles and complex semiotic patterns of language use, knowing very well how to approach tourists of divergent cultural backgrounds. Commonly acquired patterns include the use of compliments and small talk, direct versus indirect communication styles, the culturally-specific use of gestures, mimicry and adjustment of intonational features such as tempo, volume and pitch (cf. Karpf, 2006), or the use of ‘key’ (see Hymes, 1974: 57) as in “the tone, manner or spirit in which an act is done”. As stated above, this expansion of one’s repertoire can be creatively deployed to enrich one’s inventory of Coasti Slang, to achieve secrecy and to reverse hierarchies and power relationships. Knowledge of these pragmatic systems represents power.

### 1.5 Language biographies and indexicality

Indexical language biographies shape repertoires, as pointed out by Blommaert & Backus (2011: 21), who state that, “each of the resources [of a speaker] was learned in the context of specific life spans, in specific social arenas, with specific tasks, needs and objectives defined, and with specific interlocutors.” Speakers’ language biographies, defined by Franceschini & Miecznikowski (2004: vii) as “*lebensgeschichtliche[n] Erzählungen zum natürlichen Erwerb und zum Erlernen von mehreren Sprachen*” [life-historical narratives of natural acquisition and of

learning practices of several languages], can be identified as having different layers that depend upon how, when and where certain languages or language fragments were acquired in a person's linguistic lifetime. The following analysis of a Coasti Slang speaker's biography aims to dissect the complex and multilayered repertoires exhibited by many coastarians in Kenya, repertoires that indexically refer to the super-diverse surroundings and to the manifold social dimensions of language use along the coast.

Language biographies, or 'autobiographical narratives', as taken into account in studies by Busch et al. (2006), Franceschini (2001; 2002; 2003) and Pavlenko (2007), reveal the composition of repertoires and different modes of acquisition, incorporation and absorption. Language biographies can help to explain super-diverse linguistic spaces and, through analysis of the resources that have entered a speaker's repertoire, conclusions can be drawn about a learner's patterns of exposure to various linguistic landscapes and methods of language acquisition.<sup>(7)</sup> Furthermore, biographical research can help to illuminate complex multilingual spaces by carving through to inherent layers, intrinsic and extrinsic impacts, language clashes and scenarios of convergence. Blommaert and Backus (2011: 22) make the following remarks about such indexical trajectories through one's linguistic biography:

Each of these trajectories—all of them unique—contribute more than just linguistic material to one's repertoire. They contribute the potential to perform certain social roles, inhabit certain identities, be seen in a particular way by others (e.g., an articulate or inarticulate person, as in the example of informal versus formal French), and so on. The resources that enter into a repertoire are indexical resources, language materials that enable us to produce more than just linguistic meaning but to produce social and cultural images of ourself, pointing interlocutors towards the frames in which we want our meanings to be put. Repertoires are thus indexical biographies, and analyzing repertoires amounts to analyzing the social and cultural itineraries followed by people, how they manoeuvred and navigated them, and how they placed themselves into the various social arenas they inhabited or visited in their lives.

The assumption that complex biographies indexically trigger complex repertoires and help speakers to produce social and cultural images of themselves corresponds closely with Eckert's (2012) thoughts in her seminal paper on the 'third wave in the study of variation'. According to Eckert, variation constitutes a semiotic system that may contain the entire set of speakers' social concerns. Moreover, variation in language not only reflects social meaning but also actively drives social change. By creating a new practice that draws on various sources of linguistic material and playful concealing techniques, power relations are questioned and social balance is renegotiated. Furthermore, Eckert sees the context of styles, and hence the Coasti Slang linguistic practice of mixing bits and pieces from various languages to form a new business language, as the defining factor that ascribes a more specific meaning to linguistic variables. An individual's personal style is thus

clearly determined by his/her language biography.

The biography of the speaker portrayed (male, 31 years old, Kenyan, living in a village near the northern beaches of Mombasa) is influenced by societal multilingualism and by language acquisition in both private and institutional contexts. The language environment of his childhood home involved the use of both coastal Kiswahili and Kigiryama, his mother's language. Beginning in infancy, he also acquired his father's first language, Chichonyi, which was used when communicating with his kin on that side of the family. Over time, his mastery of Chichonyi reportedly exceeded his knowledge of Kigiryama. Each of these three languages is a Bantu language. In addition, he learned English, his first Indo-European language, in an institutionalized context in primary school, where Kiswahili was also taught. In this context, English emerged not only as a subject language taught in English classes but also as an instructional medium and vehicular language used in addition to Kiswahili. His second Indo-European language, learned in secondary school, was French; this exposure had an impact on the speaker's excellent proficiency in this language, which was further honed for economic reasons while working on the beach. After secondary school, this individual picked up the basics of German on the beaches, while selling souvenirs and organizing safari trips for tourists. During the same period of time, he was able to strengthen his competency in French by studying brochures, pocket guides and handwritten notes given to him by French tourists on the beach. With the popularization of Sheng in Nairobi, which initially emerged as a youth language and then developed into a widespread modern language, certain words, expressions and styles spread across the country and entered the new coastal practice, known as Coasti Slang.

Even though Coasti Slang speakers aim to clearly distance themselves from Sheng speakers from Nairobi, they are aware of certain language manipulation strategies. This particular speaker can reproduce certain expressions and manipulations from "Nairobi slang", as he calls Sheng. In his mid-twenties, he married a Luo woman from Kisumu with whom he has a child; he therefore acquired knowledge of Dholuo greetings during the marriage preparation ceremonies and in his dealings with his in-laws. Finally, on trips to the northern towns along the coast, such as Malindi, the speaker acquired a range of expressions in Italian, although in his own assessment he is far from being "competent".

Altogether, we arrive, therefore, at a total of nine 'languoids', "a cover term for any type of lingual entity: language, dialect, family, language area" (Good and Hendryx-Parker, 2006: 5, cited by Lüpke & Storch, 2013: 3), or even ten if we count Coasti Slang itself. With regard to the classification proposed by Blommaert and Backus (2011: 10–15), this multiplex biography depicts various distinct layers of learning: 'comprehensive' (growing up with Kigiryama and Kiswahili in an environment that offered access to all resources, styles and genres of these languages), 'specialized' (learning English in school as a meta-language, and French as a subject language), 'encounters' with language (e.g., learning some Dholuo and Sheng, etc.) and 'embedded' language learning (in this case, acquiring certain Italian words due to the fact that they are used interchangeably with German and French words in the creative construction of Coasti Slang).

## 1.6 Making use of touristic linguistic landscapes

Linguistic landscapes, often defined as the “visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs [...] the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs (...)” (Landry & Bourhis, 1997: 23–25), surround us everywhere. Urban spaces in particular display many tokens of a visible linguistic reality, displayed in the form of flashy billboards, graffiti, restaurant menus, writing on cars, people's clothes, tattoos and as books and newspapers in people's hands. The visual analysis of linguistic landscapes is increasingly being taken into account in the analysis of complex and super-diverse settings (Shohamy & Gorter, 2009; Shohamy, et al., 2010).

The Kenyan coast offers complex linguistic landscapes in which language manifests itself on restaurant menus along the beach, in writing on boats, in the playing of schmaltzy German and Italian songs on the beach, as well as in slogans printed on the T-shirts that tourists exchange for handicrafts (which appears to be a common current practice of barter trade). The multilingual visual influences that surround Coasti Slang speakers may, even if only to a minor extent, influence these speakers' choices of which foreign words to embed into their speech. The same applies to graffiti in Mombasa's streets, which is typically written in Sheng, or to Italian restaurant menus along the beach. With respect to restaurant menus, certain food terms taken from Italian, such as the term *calamari* ‘squid’, have entered Coasti Slang. However, in some cases, terms like *languste* ‘crayfish’ have been labeled as Italian by speakers relying on folk etymology due to the fact that they sound Italian; in reality, this term is German, the Italian equivalent being *gamberi di fiume*.

While I was taking ethnographic notes pertaining to business transactions on the beach, documenting the manifold linguistic impacts to which speakers are exposed, a beach vendor walked by wearing a T-shirt with the printed German slogan “*Ich kann nichts dafür—ich bin so!!!*” (‘I can't help it—this is how I am!!!’). The printed message evokes certain associations with a female teenage attitude and may have been a female tourist's gift to her temporary lover, apparently a common practice among sex workers and female customers. Such performed feminization of style is then redressed through the super-masculine verbal practices that serve as a foundation of Coasti Slang (see above). Nearby speakers who were assisting me were then asked whether the young man wearing that shirt would be likely to understand what was printed on it. They replied that he would most definitely know that the printed slogan was in German, which might assure him of a degree of visual attention from prospective German customers.

In addition to instances of written language in public spaces, language derived from videos, music and virtual spaces is also absorbed by Coasti Slang speakers as they seek out new lexical input to enhance their practice. For instance, Congolese and Ugandan popular music is often used as background music in entertainment shows put on by hotels, and performed by local (beach) artists. In the case of Congolese music, Koffi Olomide's most popular songs are repeatedly played in hotels during musical performances and help spread common Lingala terms

such as *bolingo* ‘love’ and *kitóko* ‘beautiful’ among performing artists, which then enter Coasti Slang speakers’ repertoire. The Ugandan song *Amaaso* (‘eyes’) by Radio and Weasel, played all along the East African coast in 2014, made artists and beach boys take notice of Luganda<sup>(8)</sup> and resulted in the spreading of a few words of this language.

## 2. THE LINGUISTIC CONSTRUCTION OF COASTI SLANG

The linguistic construction of Coasti Slang reveals speakers’ deliberate choices in shaping a new linguistic practice that fulfills their needs and indexically refers to their large underlying repertoires. While Coasti Slang clearly arose out of a situation of partial acquisition among multilingual speakers who began to use a genderized German core lexicon, it is currently considered to be a general practice that borrows terms and fully integrates them into its repertoire of varieties, linguistic choices and styles. Nonetheless, I prefer to describe the partial acquisition patterns exhibited by speakers as ‘lexical references to German, Sheng etc.,’ since the idea of a speaker’s fluid repertoire, which can be expanded and enriched through new languages, varieties or (as explained in the section on speakers’ biographies) through ‘encounters’ with languages (with only a few words of a language entering an individual’s repertoire, cf. Blommaert & Backus, 2011) is much more appropriate for this case. These fluid instances of expanding repertoires and the broadening of choices through partial acquisition do not correspond to the notion of codeswitching among distinct languages as fixed entities.

The fact that speakers’ choices determine the form of Coasti Slang correlates with the general assumption that there is a “part of linguistic behaviour that is subject to conscious control, to deliberate choice, to purposeful and reflective behavior,” as Labov (1994: 598) describes it. However, while Labov (1994: 78) understands instances of language change to be either triggered “from above” or “from below”, Thomason (1999: 23) argues that the “linguistic possibility of a change—in this case a deliberate change—is settled as soon as a single speaker produces a single instance of the change at a single time”, a perspective that underlines speakers’ agency in the process of creating a new linguistic practice. In Coasti Slang, there are practically no ‘saccadic leaders’ (Labov, 2001) who occupy a leadership role as authorities of linguistic change. Creative speakers may access all the linguistic resources that they believe other in-group members will possibly understand (and that will be unintelligible to outsiders), covering a broad emblematic lexicon drawn from English, German, Kigiriyama, and to a lesser extent Italian, French, Sheng and other languages. However, manipulation processes, such as those that operate on a phonological level (e.g., metathesis, clipping and acronyms), are not common in Coasti Slang.<sup>(9)</sup>

In the following discussion, the lexical pools from which Coasti Slang draws most of its linguistic choices are introduced with examples. Terms from English and languages such as Swahili, i.e., from the most widespread languages in the country, are often semantically manipulated for purposes of concealment (see Tables 2–3).

## 2.1 Using (genderized) tourist language as a mobile lexical pool

German, as the main tourist language in Nyali, Bamburi and Shanzu Beach north of Mombasa, represents an especially popular lexifier. A number of acquired lexemes (from German, French and Italian) are listed below, with most of these constituting a portion of the genderized core lexicon that was created by male sex workers. In the table below, such examples of the core lexicon, if they are linked to sex for sale, are marked as LGS ('linguistic genderization as style'), following Motschenbacher (2010: 49–52).

**Table 1.** Examples illustrating partial acquisition from tourist languages (including the genderized core lexicon)\*<sup>1</sup>

| Lexeme                                        | Gloss                                                        | Origin                                                                                             | Genderized core lexicon                                       |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>altemann</i> [alteman]                     | 'elderly, weak-looking man'                                  | German ( <i>alter Mann</i> 'old man')                                                              | LGS                                                           |
| <i>(ma)brile</i> [mabrile]<br>(cf. example 1) | 'shades'                                                     | German ( <i>Brille</i> 'glasses')                                                                  | ---                                                           |
| <i>funftsish</i> [fynftsə]                    | 'fifty shilling banknote'                                    | German ( <i>fünfzig</i> 'fifty')                                                                   | LGS                                                           |
| <i>(ma)geldi</i> (cf. ex. 2)                  | 'money'                                                      | German ( <i>Geld</i> 'money')                                                                      | LGS                                                           |
| <i>geshaftimaken</i><br>[gəʃɛftiməkn]         | 'to do business, to sell, to trade'                          | German ( <i>Geschäfte machen</i> 'to do business')                                                 | LGS                                                           |
| <i>grosatsima</i>                             | 'large room'                                                 | German ( <i>großes Zimmer</i> 'large room')                                                        | LGS (perceived as setting for sexual activity)                |
| <i>kaalte</i> [kaʔalte]                       | 'old man/woman'                                              | colloquial German ( <i>Alte</i> 'wife mistress'; Kigiryama NCP12 <i>ka-</i> expressing diminutive) | LGS                                                           |
| <i>kafrau</i> [kaɸrawu:]                      | 'woman, girl'                                                | German ( <i>Frau</i> 'woman'; Kigiryama NCP12 <i>ka-</i> expressing diminutive)                    | LGS                                                           |
| <i>klar</i> [klar] (ex. 3)                    | 'cool, easy, alright'                                        | German ( <i>klar</i> 'clear')                                                                      | ---                                                           |
| <i>kollege</i> [kulige]<br>(ex. 4)            | 'friend, buddy'                                              | German ( <i>Kollege</i> 'colleague; in colloquial German among youths: male friend, buddy')        | LGS                                                           |
| <i>kubumsen</i><br>[bumzən] (ex. 5)           | 'to have sex'                                                | German ( <i>bumsen</i> 'to fuck, to screw, to bang,' vulg.)                                        | LGS                                                           |
| <i>kubumziwa</i><br>[bumziwa]                 | 'to be penetrated by a homosexual partner'                   | German ( <i>bumsen</i> ; Swahili passive derivational affix <i>-iw</i> )                           | LGS                                                           |
| <i>kugeben</i> [geben]<br>(ex. 5)             | 'to show strong sexual performance, to 'give it to someone'' | German ( <i>geben</i> 'to give')                                                                   | LGS (perceived as male sex performance)                       |
| <i>kusaufen</i><br>[kusawufən] (ex. 6)        | 'to get drunk, to booze'                                     | German ( <i>saufen</i> 'to booze')                                                                 | LGS (also perceived as a primarily male behavioral component) |

|                                            |                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                     |
|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>langseit</i> [laŋsait]                  | ‘a long time ago’                           | German ( <i>lange Zeit</i> ‘long time, probably calqued from Kiswahili <i>zamani</i> )                                                                                                 | LGS (when used while flirting and in nostalgic talks about romance) |
| <i>languste</i>                            | ‘crayfish’                                  | German ( <i>Languste</i> ; according to speakers beliefs about etymology, this was labeled as a word taken from Italian, although the actual Italian term is <i>gamberi di fiume</i> ) | ---                                                                 |
| <i>maDeutsche</i><br>[madɔytʃi]            | ‘German tourists’                           | German ( <i>Deutsch</i> ‘German’)                                                                                                                                                      | ---                                                                 |
| <i>maheseni</i><br>[maheseni]              | ‘food, snacks’                              | German ( <i>Essen</i> ‘food’)                                                                                                                                                          | ---                                                                 |
| <i>mittag</i> [mitage]<br>(cf. ex. 7)      | ‘lunch’                                     | German ( <i>Mittag</i> ‘midday, noon’)                                                                                                                                                 | ---                                                                 |
| <i>noya</i> [noja], (Pl.)<br><i>manoya</i> | ‘new tourist’                               | German ( <i>neu</i> ‘new’)                                                                                                                                                             | ---                                                                 |
| <i>strande</i> [ʃtrandə]                   | ‘beach areas’                               | German ( <i>Strand</i> ‘beach’)                                                                                                                                                        | ---                                                                 |
| <i>kutsalen</i> [kutsalən]                 | ‘to pay’                                    | German ( <i>zahlen</i> ‘to pay’)                                                                                                                                                       | LGS                                                                 |
| <i>wasser</i> (ex. 8)                      | ‘leaking water’                             | German ( <i>Wasser</i> ‘water’)                                                                                                                                                        | ---                                                                 |
| <i>keke</i>                                | ‘marijuana’                                 | French (Swiss French <i>keke</i> ‘marihuana, weed’)                                                                                                                                    | ---                                                                 |
| <i>maBonjour</i>                           | ‘French tourists’                           | French (metonymy from French greeting <i>bonjour</i> )* <sup>2</sup>                                                                                                                   | ---                                                                 |
| <i>amico, amico</i>                        | ‘friend, buddy; customer (term of address)’ | Italian (lit. ‘friend’)                                                                                                                                                                | ---                                                                 |
| <i>macomestare</i><br>(ex. 9)              | ‘Italian tourists’                          | Italian (metonymy, greeting <i>come stai?</i> ‘how are you?’)                                                                                                                          | ---                                                                 |
| <i>signora</i> (ex. 10)                    | ‘beautiful girl, chick’                     | Italian (lit. ‘lady, woman’)                                                                                                                                                           | LGS                                                                 |
| <i>calamari</i>                            | ‘squid’                                     | Italian (found on various Italian and German restaurant menus along the beach)                                                                                                         | ---                                                                 |
| <i>maAmigo</i>                             | ‘Italian tourists’                          | Italian (malapropism from Italian <i>amico</i> )* <sup>3</sup>                                                                                                                         | ---                                                                 |

\*<sup>1</sup> As previously stated, instead of describing the processes of speakers who use a large repertoire as mere borrowing or code-switching, their more fluid character (depending upon the locality along the coast) is expressed through the term ‘partial acquisition’, originating from Lipski (2002), who states that partial knowledge of a language can serve social purposes. This also implies that certain words constitute a flexible lexicon, e.g., those that can be taken either from German (in Mom-basa) or, presumably, from Italian in Malindi.

\*<sup>2</sup> In the examples presented here, French terms are scarce. Their use depends upon location, the identity of the particular Coasti Slang speaker, his individual biography and the frequency with which he uses French. The relatively minor importance of French compared to German and Italian was explained by one speaker who stated that, “French people are coming occasionally, they are not coming every season; but, in South coast, there is hotel for French people. But here, Long Beach, they are coming rare.” (Tela, January 2015)

\*<sup>3</sup> Due to the fact that this term was produced on a German-dominated beach by Coasti Slang speakers whose main lexifier was German, it may have been corrupted due to a lack of sufficient knowledge of Italian. Around Italian-dominated Malindi, (one speaker asserted in January 2015 that “Malindi belongs to the mafia”), the nomenclature for arriving groups may be quite different.



- (10) *signora*            *a-na-pend-ez-a*  
 cl1a.girl            3sgS-PRS-love-CAUS-IND  
 ‘The girl is hot.’

## 2.2 Using English

English is the official language of Kenya and serves as a common lexifier for Coasti Slang. However, in many cases speakers manipulate the semantics of a concept and use stylistic devices such as metaphors, dysphemisms or onomastic synecdoche to trigger semantic change. As with German lexemes, most of the items acquired from English have emerged out of a gender-based discourse.

**Table 2.** Examples illustrating partial acquisition from English

| Lexeme                                                 | Gloss                                      | Origin                                                                                              | Genderized lexicon                                                                                    |
|--------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>baldihedi</i>                                       | ‘bald head, shaved head’                   | English ( <i>bald head</i> )                                                                        | LGS (this is viewed as a hairstyle that is not favorable for sex business, in contrast to dreadlocks) |
| <i>kufucki</i> [kufaki]                                | ‘to have sex’                              | English ( <i>to fuck</i> )                                                                          | LGS                                                                                                   |
| <i>ma-King-George</i><br>[makindʒɔdʒi]                 | ‘British tourists’                         | English (onomastic synecdoche relating to the name of the former British King George)               | ---                                                                                                   |
| <i>ma-fucking-George</i><br>[mafakindʒɔdʒi]            | ‘British tourists’                         | English (dysphemistic onomastic synecdoche, see above)                                              | ---                                                                                                   |
| <i>blue</i>                                            | ‘twenty shilling banknote’                 | English (referring to the blue color of the old twenty shilling banknote, in use from 1966 to 2003) | LGS                                                                                                   |
| <i>matiti</i>                                          | ‘female breasts’                           | English <i>tit</i>                                                                                  | LGS                                                                                                   |
| <i>shore</i> [ʃɔɾɛ]                                    | ‘girl, chick’                              | English (metaphor <i>shore</i> ; referring to the shore’s beauty and curvy line on a map)           | LGS                                                                                                   |
| <i>chicken meat</i>                                    | ‘new European tourist’                     | English (referring to new tourists’ white skin color, lacking a tan)                                | ---                                                                                                   |
| <i>oranges</i>                                         | ‘female breasts’                           | English (figurative association with size, color or shape)                                          | LGS                                                                                                   |
| <i>fucking business</i><br>[fokin biɕines]<br>(ex. 11) | ‘sex tourism’                              | English                                                                                             | LGS                                                                                                   |
| <i>biashara congressi</i>                              | ‘deals (of beach boys with hotel workers)’ | English, Kiswahili                                                                                  | LGS                                                                                                   |
| <i>maribeni</i>                                        | ‘shades’                                   | English (metonymy from brand name <i>Ray-Ban</i> )                                                  | ---                                                                                                   |
| <i>ghetto</i>                                          | ‘house’                                    | English (dysphemism, ‘ghetto’)                                                                      | ---                                                                                                   |

- (11) *ile m.goso a-na-kuj-a kwa fucking business*  
 cl9:DEM cl1.tourist 3sgS-PRG-come-IND for sex.tourism  
 'This tourist comes for sex tourism.'

### 2.3 Using Kiswahili and local languages or group languages

As stated earlier, Coasti Slang is Swahili-based but also contains lexical items from languages such as Kigiryama, Chichonyi, Chidigo and others that are spoken along the coast. The following overview groups together some of the most recurrent linguistic choices, which have also been to some extent relexified in processes of semantic change and manipulation. Again, a number of these examples refer to linguistic genderization.

**Table 3.** Lexical reference to Kiswahili and 'group languages'

| Lexeme                          | Gloss                                                  | Origin                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Genderized lexicon                                                    |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>gara</i>                     | 'fine, nice, okay'                                     | Kigiryama (as a reply to questions concerning one's state of being)                                                                                                                                         | ---                                                                   |
| <i>hajaharibika</i>             | 'being a new tourist to the beach'                     | Kiswahili ( <i>hajaharibika</i> 'he/she is not yet spoilt' refers to the innocence and naive attitude of a newcomer)                                                                                        | LGS (associating purity with not "being spoilt" by sexual corruption) |
| <i>hero</i>                     | 'Maasai, Samburu vendor'                               | Maa (metonymy from Maa greeting <i>ero suba</i> )                                                                                                                                                           | ---                                                                   |
| <i>kamama</i>                   | 'woman, girl'                                          | universal ( <i>mama</i> 'mature woman'; <i>ka</i> —NCP12 in Kigiryama expressing diminutive)                                                                                                                | LGS                                                                   |
| <i>kiruka-njia</i>              | 'old sex tourist'                                      | Kiswahili (figurative speech, lit. 'flying over the way')                                                                                                                                                   | LGS                                                                   |
| <i>kuku wa gradi</i><br>[gredi] | 'hotel worker'                                         | Kiswahili (metaphor, lit. 'chicken of valuable grade', dysphemistic expression to describe hotel workers' lack of freedom—they are kept in a 'cage', they are dominated and 'domesticized' by sex tourists) | LGS                                                                   |
| <i>kupakwa</i>                  | 'to be taken, to be used for sex'                      | Kiswahili (metaphor, lit. 'to be smeared')                                                                                                                                                                  | LGS                                                                   |
| <i>kuwa na barafu</i>           | 'to have white skin, being a new tourist to the beach' | Kiswahili (the metaphor <i>bado ana barafu</i> 'he/she still has ice' refers to the pale and white color of new tourists, who are the best business targets)                                                | ---                                                                   |

|                                                |                                                   |                                                                                                   |     |
|------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| <i>mbao</i>                                    | ‘twenty shilling banknote’                        | Kiswahili (metaphor from <i>mbao</i> ‘wood’)                                                      | LGS |
| <i>mgonjwa</i>                                 | ‘marijuana user’                                  | Kiswahili (metaphor, literally ‘sick person’)                                                     | --- |
| <i>mitikasi teleweka?</i><br>(cf. also ex. 12) | ‘what is the program?<br>how are things?’         | manipulation of Kiswahili words and coinage (?)                                                   | --- |
| <i>mnyama</i>                                  | ‘old female sex tourist’                          | Kiswahili (metaphor, lit. ‘animal’)                                                               | LGS |
| <i>msela</i>                                   | ‘guy, boy; friend’                                | manipulation of Kiswahili word or coinage (?)                                                     | LGS |
| <i>mzigo</i>                                   | ‘marijuana’                                       | Kiswahili (metaphor, lit. ‘load’)                                                                 | --- |
| <i>ndehe</i>                                   | ‘ten shilling banknote’                           | manipulation of Kiswahili word or coinage (?)                                                     | LGS |
| <i>obimba</i>                                  | ‘muscle training,<br>workout’                     | Kiswahili (figurative speech, – <i>vimba</i> ‘to swell’)                                          | LGS |
| <i>pira</i>                                    | ‘car’                                             | Kiswahili (metonymy, lit. ‘tire’)                                                                 | --- |
| <i>sindadze!</i>                               | ‘hello, hi!’                                      | Kigiryama (greeting <i>udzasindadze</i> ‘good afternoon,’ lit. ‘How do you spend (a whole day)?’) | --- |
| <i>vide [viðe]</i>                             | ‘how are you?’                                    | Kigiryama (greeting)                                                                              | --- |
| <i>wakulima</i>                                | ‘Kenyan tourists (from Nairobi and other cities)’ | Kiswahili (dysphemism, literally ‘farmers’)                                                       | --- |

- (12) *Vipi ni kasi ya leo?*  
INTERROG COP program CONN:cl9 today  
‘What is the program for today?’

## 2.4 Using Sheng and other ‘languages’

In addition to Indo-European languages as tourist languages, English as the official language and Bantu languages, Coasti Slang also draws on other forms of language such as youth language practices like Sheng. Here again, examples such as *wowowo* ‘a woman’s buttocks’ and a number of others relate to sex.

**Table 4.** Lexical reference to Sheng and other language practices

| Lexeme                 | Gloss                 | Origin                                                                                    | Genderized lexicon |
|------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| <i>gulugulu</i>        | ‘sex, prostitution’   | coinage?                                                                                  | LGS                |
| <i>hora hora hora!</i> | ‘let’s go! hurry up!’ | Sheng (motivating shouts by bus conductors, indicating time of departure at the bus park) | ---                |
| <i>kademu</i>          | ‘girl, chick, woman’  | Sheng ( <i>demu</i> ‘girl’; <i>ka</i> –NCP12 in Kigiryama expressing diminutive)          | LGS                |

|                        |                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                            |
|------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| <i>manzi</i>           | 'girl'                  | Sheng                                                                                                                                                                                                   | LGS                                        |
| <i>mngoso</i>          | 'white person, tourist' | Sheng (alternative to <i>mzungu</i> and common in Nairobi)                                                                                                                                              | ---                                        |
| <i>nati</i>            | 'dreadlocks'            | Sheng (but also a recurrent label for dreadlocks and Rastafaris in other Bantu languages and derived from Jamaican <i>natty dreadlocks</i> 'Rastafari; person with dreadlocks'; Hollington, p.c., 2015) | LGS (preferred hairstyle for sex business) |
| <i>poa</i>             | 'fine, nice, okay'      | Sheng (first emerged in Sheng and then spread internationally through numerous Swahili varieties)                                                                                                       | ---                                        |
| <i>salasa</i> (ex. 13) | 'thirty shillings'      | Arabic (realizing the numeral in a more 'Arabicized' way than Kiswahili <i>thelathini</i> , from [θala:θa])                                                                                             | LGS                                        |
| <i>wowowo</i>          | 'a woman's buttocks'    | Ideophone / Coinage (mimicry of astonishment)                                                                                                                                                           | LGS                                        |

- (13) *Ni-ach-e*                      *salasa*    *m-tu*                      *wangu!*  
 1sgO-leave-SUBJ              NUM              cl1-person              POSS.cl1  
 'Give me (leave me) 30 shillings, my friend!'

### 3. OUTLOOK FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The present paper has described Coasti Slang as a fluid Swahili-based linguistic practice along the Kenyan coast, currently used as a work language among vendors, beach boys, artists, hotel workers and others, after having emerged as a super-masculine genderized style among male prostitutes. The gender perspective of Coasti Slang in its early stages creates a linguistic equilibrium against the performed femininized identities that surround tourists' financial hegemonies and social dependencies.

It is described as a style that draws heavily from the most prominent languages in particular beach areas, i.e., from German in Mombasa, and reportedly from Italian around Malindi. Speakers share super-diverse repertoires, which they use to conceal meaning from outsiders, and they reveal complex language biographies composed of distinct underlying layers. Partial language acquisition (Lipski, 2002) is viewed as a respected and common practice due to its association with a better life arising from economic success. The beach areas thus function as the main operational areas in which the newly created language practice is used for business, and where tourist languages and Bantu languages are in permanent contact.

Due to the fact that it was primarily sex workers who contributed to the emergence of Coasti Slang, copying lexemes with strongly genderized overtones

from their customers, Coasti Slang is loaded with vulgar terms such as *(ku)bumsen* [bumzən] for ‘to have sex’, which are currently used without any negative connotations. Thus, to outsiders who only understand certain vulgar or derogatory terms (or who are unaware of the underlying genderizing motivation of its early speakers), Coasti Slang can appear to be a rude or impolite language, standing in clear opposition to coastal Swahili with its very complex politeness patterns revolving around the concepts of avoiding *haya* ‘shame’ and maintaining *heshima* ‘respect’. Nonetheless, due to speakers’ use of complex repertoires that draw from numerous lexical pools simultaneously, certain vulgar terms may lose their negative connotations. However, a more detailed analysis of pragmatic change and the increasing importance of context in language use and acquisition along the beach would shed light on speakers’ violations of linguistic taboos and negative politeness patterns, phenomena that have been observed in other varieties in the same area.

It will be of great interest to explore the question of whether (as reported by speakers and presumed by the present author), and to what extent, Coasti Slang shifts in its use of the matrix language from a practice that predominantly draws from German in Mombasa to an Italian-dominated practice around Malindi. Confirmation of such a shift would underscore the fluid nature of Coasti Slang and the mobility of linguistic resources along the coastline, which vary depending upon tourists’ repertoires, economic development and the speed of speakers’ adaptation to changing linguistic landscapes.

Very often, tourists coming to Kenya learn a few words of Swahili (e.g., the popular Swahili phrase *hakuna matata* is an emblematic exotic souvenir), which they repeatedly use when interacting with beach boys, ordering meals, sharing drinks with other tourists at the pool bar, and in online forums and on Facebook pages after their return, making an effort to display in-group status and local knowledge and to mark themselves as polyglots. However, Coasti Slang speakers are aware that tourists’ linguistic resources are extremely limited compared with their own skills, knowledge, and patterns of acquisition. The present paper has analyzed Coasti Slang speakers’ repertoires without taking into account tourists themselves as agentive language learners or participants. Further research should focus on the repertoires of tourists and their acquisition of Swahili or slang vocabulary and on their agency in the process of learning local languages; an analysis of the mythology of the ‘exotic language’ or the phenomenon of linguistic souvenirs should prove to be illuminating. The mobility and agency of tourists who play, discover, manipulate and have a strong impact on new hybrid spaces (see Sheller & Urry, 2004) must be taken into consideration.

In addition to the aforementioned issues, descriptions providing more details regarding the linguistic landscapes along the Kenyan coast, examining both public and virtual spaces, would also enrich the study of the multiplex language biographies and repertoires of individuals on the Kenyan coast. Research efforts should extend well beyond the focus of the present preliminary paper if they are to provide deeper and fuller insights into the linguistic practices of *coastarians* and tourists and their respective linguistic pools.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS** The data analyzed in the present paper were collected in Mombasa in January 2015. Special thanks are owed to Wilson and Tela and to some of their colleagues who work along Bamburi Beach (often called 'Long Beach'), an area that is heavily frequented by German tourists. The coastal areas further north around Watamu and Malindi, which appear to be much more Italian-dominated, have not (yet) been taken into consideration in the course of this research. While a portion of the data was acquired through qualitative interviews, other results were obtained through observation of participants on the beach, between hotels and in local shops. Most interviews were conducted with the help of so-called 'beach boys,' primarily the young male speakers Tela and Wilson who willingly agreed to participate in the research as consultants. I warmly thank Anne Storch for rich and inspiring discussions of earlier drafts of the paper, particularly for her thoughts on gender and style. I also thank Angelika Mietzner for sharing her valuable research with me, and Mary Chambers for proofreading the manuscript. I am also indebted to Andrea Hollington and Maren Rüsck.

## NOTES

- (1) Various examples of popular literature have contributed to the myth of either finding one's long-sought love on a Kenyan beach (such as Corinne Hofmann's *The White Masai*, 1998) or at least obtaining high-quality sex with young beach boys who offer the possibility of long affiliations spanning a number of years. Kenya as a paradise for elderly Caucasian women has been attracting an increasing amount of media attention, which apparently led to the broadcasting of a new series in 2013 on Kenyan TV dealing with older European women who come to Kenya to find the love of their lives.
- (2) That all of us "do gender linguistically" becomes evident in considering the development of gender roles through discourse and socialization. The construction of gender through verbal action is a natural development for all adolescents, since notions of femininity and masculinity in language are typically suggested in 'styles' that are imposed upon individuals by society (see Coates, 1999: 123–124). For more detailed studies on gender and language, see Bucholtz et al. (1999).
- (3) Another recurrent pattern, the use of German proverbs (*misemo ya Deutsche*) as markers of in-group identity and inclusion, seems to occur in analogy with proverb use among older Swahili speakers, who use them to demonstrate authority, wisdom and knowledge. As reported by Angelika Mietzner (p.c., December 2014), many beach boys use proverbs in their interactions with tourists, revealing a surprisingly vast knowledge of various foreign—in this case German—proverbs. Speakers confirmed in January 2015 that they acquire proverbs from books that tourists leave with them and that they consider this to be a part of their language mastery; they then make use of them whenever needed. In addition to using established proverbs, speakers also coin or calque proverbs. This is evident in the documentary "*Sextourismus Kenia—Schöner fremder Mann*" [Sex tourism Kenya—handsome foreign gentleman], provided by spiegel.tv (<http://www.spiegel.tv/filme/orf-sextourismus-kenia-schoener-fremder-mann/>), in which two German-speaking male sex workers who operate on the beach are asked if they reject older women as clients in their sex business. They reply in fluent German that this would not be a problem, adding "*was wir glauben: Auch die alt[e] Katze[n] trinken Milch. Milch ist für alle Katze[n]*" [What we believe: Even old cats drink milk, milk is for all cats] (04'10"), thus coining a new proverb (or calquing it from another

- language).
- (4) The Kenyan coast has, in analogy with Zanzibar in neighboring Tanzania, been the setting for missionaries' attempts to establish a Kiswahili standard. Johann Ludwig Krapf compiled (together with Johannes Rebmann) a Swahili grammar for the Church Missionary Society (Krapf & Rebmann, 1850) as well as a dictionary (Krapf, 1882) based on the establishment of a standard called Kimvita. Edward Steere collected tales about Zanzibar and wrote a grammar, establishing the dialect of Kiunguja, while in Bagamoyo, Sacleux established Kimrima (Miehe, 1995). All three of these large dialect centers—particularly those of Kimvita and Kiunguja—competed for perceived linguistic purity, authority, and supremacy in the production of truth and knowledge. To this day, Swahili speakers' mindsets are influenced by colonial corpus planning and standardization, classifying language usage into 'good Swahili' (mostly coastal Swahili, with Kiunguja enjoying greater prestige than Kimvita) and 'bad Swahili' (mostly Kenya Pidgin Swahili and others; see Heine, 1973).
  - (5) 'Gs' here stands for 'gangsters'.
  - (6) The 'mobile subjects' mentioned by Blommaert and Backus here refers to Coasti Slang speakers, not tourists. German tourists are, despite their physical trajectories, rather immobile subjects who often seek to shift their accustomed environment, practices and habits to a more 'exotic' destination. This includes, for instance, culinary practices and comfort with respect to living conditions.
  - (7) As in Franceschini & Miecznikowski (2004: viii), the main contribution of language biographies can be seen in their documentary value, depicting how speakers deal with numerous languages throughout their lifespan. Furthermore, these biographies help provide a picture of the complex acquisition and learning processes that underlie speakers' integration of linguistic elements (bits) into their repertoires. The speaker-centered perspective of language biography research is, therefore, its main advantage, placing the focus on speakers' circumstances, motivations and agency in these processes.
  - (8) Whereas Lingala constitutes the most widespread lingua franca in DR Congo and serves as the language of its music and of its army, Luganda, a language that has spread across Buganda and into the Ugandan capital Kampala, is predominant in Ugandan popular music.
  - (9) Processes of syllable permutation have been reported in Giryama villages, where they occur among young people who use metathesis in their interactions (in Kigiryama). This practice appears to have a playful character and may represent an example of 'ludling'.
  - (10) This example was provided by male speakers as a concealed way of demanding sex in a village among village inhabitants (male to female). Here too, Coasti Slang serves to transport a sexualized (masculinized) message to a female 'business partner', even though no tourist is involved or addressed.

## ABBREVIATIONS

|      |                       |
|------|-----------------------|
| CAUS | causative             |
| cll  | noun class 1          |
| CONN | connective            |
| COP  | copula                |
| CoP  | community of practice |
| DEM  | demonstrative         |

|          |                                   |
|----------|-----------------------------------|
| IMPV     | imperfective                      |
| IND      | indicative                        |
| INF      | infinitive                        |
| INTERROG | interrogative                     |
| LGS      | linguistic genderization as style |
| LOC      | locative                          |
| LOC.POSS | locative-possessive               |
| NC       | noun class                        |
| NCP      | noun class prefix                 |
| NEG      | negation                          |
| NUM      | numeral                           |
| O        | object                            |
| pl       | plural                            |
| POSS     | possessive                        |
| PRG      | progressive                       |
| PRS      | present tense                     |
| S        | subject                           |
| SEQ      | sequential                        |
| sg       | singular                          |
| SUBJ     | subjunctive                       |

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——— Accepted March 28, 2016

Author's Name and Address: Nico NASSENSTEIN, *Institute for African Studies and Egyptology, University of Cologne, Meister Eckehart Str. 7, 50923 Köln, GERMANY.*  
 E-mail: nico.nassenstein [at] uni-koeln.de