



Negotiating language barriers in communication: The case of Tanzanian inmates in Ghana

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Abstract

This study investigates communication barriers faced by Tanzanian immigrants serving prison terms in Ghana for various offences. Given the role of communication in inmates' daily lives, including various processes and procedures within the prison yards, the study seeks to examine strategies employed by such inmates to meet their social/communicative needs within the prison environs. The study is carried out against the backdrop of some East African migrants encountering communication barriers in Ghana. The main objective is to investigate the effect of communication barriers on Tanzanian inmates at Nsawam Prisons and the linguistic support system in place within the prison yards for such inmates. The study also looks at the coping strategies to overcome such communicative barriers and the long-term negative and positive effects of the language barrier on their linguistic abilities. Data were collected by two research assistants with funding support from the Andrew Mellon Foundation through the administration of questionnaires and interview sessions with five Tanzanian inmates. The findings of the study indicate that in addition to the use of similar coping strategies that are used by other East African migrants, resident in Ghana, such as gestures and the seeking of assistance for interpretation, Tanzanian inmates in Nsawam Prisons ultimately learn a Ghanaian language because they see the acquisition of a Ghanaian language as an effective solution to the challenges of language barriers at the Nsawam Prisons. It was also noted that although gender differences played a role in the linguistic choices of these inmates, individual preferences for negotiating linguistic barriers were paramount.

Keywords: *communication barriers, coping strategies, migrants, multilingual*

Background to the study

It has been established in an earlier study (Dzahene-Quarshie & Marjie, 2020) that East African migrants in Ghana generally face communication barriers. Like other migrants in the host country, this situation necessitates them to resort to various strategies in order to overcome these linguistic challenges (Zhu & Zhu, 2004; Wood,

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2006; Ansah et al., 2017). Dzahene-Quarshie and Marjie (2020) established that, East African migrants in Ghana experience communicative barriers, especially, in the linguistic domain of the market, among others. Beyond the use of gestures as a strategy to overcome communication barriers, these migrants go to the extent of acquiring basic language skills in the languages of the host countries (Ansah et al., 2017; Bleakley & Chin, 2004; Blommaert & Backus, 2012; Dustmann & Fabbri, 2016). Migrants posit that sometimes there is a need to learn the languages of the host countries albeit through informal means (Ansah et al., 2017; Liv, 2017). They further maintained that learning the local languages of the host countries is done to gain acceptance as well as the ability to communicate effectively while in the host countries. Naturally, some migrants may find themselves in the grip of the law as a result of engaging in certain illegalities in the host countries, and these may constitute crimes that may result in their apprehension and ultimately, punishable by incarceration. We observed that some East African migrants are serving jail terms in Nsawam prisons³, Ghana's Medium Security Prisons for various offenses. Although the prison is usually a restricted and controlled environment, language use may not be as controlled. This is because people serving terms in prisons may come from different linguistic, educational, social, and ethnic backgrounds. Thus, communication barriers may occur among inmates. This study as a follow-up on Dzahene-Quarshie and Marjie (2020) (which looked at how language barriers are negotiated by East African migrants in Ghana) investigates communication barriers faced by Tanzanian immigrants who are serving jail terms in Nsawam Prisons in Ghana. It is envisaged that a replica of the multilingual landscape of other linguistic domains would prevail in the prisons, thus authenticating the likelihood of Tanzanian inmates encountering some communication difficulties.

Given the role of communication in the daily lives of inmates, with regard to various processes and procedures within the prison yards, the study seeks to examine strategies employed by such inmates in order to meet their linguistic and social needs in the prison environs. The main research questions that the study seeks to answer are:

- (a) What particular communication problems are encountered by Tanzanian inmates at the prison during communication with fellow inmates and prison wardens?
- (b) What linguistic support system exists within the prison yard for them, if any?
- (c) What coping strategies are employed by Tanzanian inmates to overcome communication challenges?
- (d) What are the effects the of language barrier on their linguistic ability?

The study is carried out against the backdrop of East African migrants encountering communication barriers in Ghana. The situation becomes more complex for Tanzanians who get arrested, prosecuted, and imprisoned because for them, English

³ [1] Nsawam Prison is Ghana's Medium Security Prisons, and it houses about 3576 prisoners. It has two prisons for male and female sections. It is located in the Eastern Region of Ghana. It is the main and biggest prison in Ghana and is currently undergoing refurbishment.



is a second or third language and invariably, they have difficulty in understanding and/ or speaking it. This means that their communication with fellow inmates, prison wardens, and their legal counsel (if any) may be impeded by language barriers.

Migration and Language Situation in the Prisons

One of the major problems that confront migrants in their host countries is the communication barrier. Phan (2012) Li, & Sah (2019) and Dzahene-Quarshie & Marjie (2020) in similar studies have shown that the linguistic differences that may exist between the country of origin and the host country endure migrants to find ways and means of having effective communication while in the host country. Dzahene-Quarshie & Marjie (2020) argue that East African migrants face many linguistic challenges during their stay in Ghana. These as well as migrants in other countries, therefore, resort to various linguistic strategies to overcome communication challenges (Vigouroux, 2009; Dustmann & Fabbri, 2003; Bleakley & Chin, 2004; Ansah et al., 2017; Yu & Shandu, 2017; Amuzu et al., 2019; Laliberté, 2019). These strategies include the use of gestures as well as asking for interpretation assistance from natives. Some go beyond these to learn some basic language skills of the host country (Van Tubergen and Kalmijn, 2009). Oucho and Williams (2019) found in their study on the importance of migrants' proficiency in the language of the host country that immigrants deliberately invest in learning the host country's language because knowledge of the host language is an important ingredient for economic success. Thus, there are some economic gains from learning the host language.

On the other hand, in the unfortunate situation where some immigrants find themselves serving jail terms, they require some basic local language skills for communication in the prisons too. The prison may be a restricted and controlled environment, however, language use in the place may not be restricted. Flock (2019) reveals that the prison is a fertile ground for a variety of languages to develop. Kearse (2011) found in a study that there exist kinds of vernacular in prisons, thus language in prison or prisons can be described as slang. This is possible because the prison shelters people from many different ethnic, educational, and social backgrounds. Kearse (2011) termed prison language as a code that he believes has some resemblances to the street language in mainstream cities and towns. Such an argument is suggestive that people who end up in prisons are often semi-literates or illiterates. This notion is not entirely true as the prisons, especially Medium Security Prisons have learning centres for inmates to study (Kearse, 2011). Sometimes the need arises for inmates to create a common language for effective communication. Wilson (2012) argues that prison is one of the few places today where language is being created. Language is created for many reasons within the prison. Kearse (2011) explains that one of such reasons is to outwit the guards or to keep them from knowing what's going on among inmates. He states that sometimes, the language is created for humorous reasons. At other times too, the language is created as code for survival. Again, the use of such slang is usually to discuss everyday happenings such as family issues, or a new music album. Kearse (2011) continues to argue that because prisoners do not have their privacy, talking in slang or another language in prison is often done simply to protect a person's privacy.

It is also possible that some languages will be used more in prisons than others. This may depend on the majority language being used in the country or as a matter of policy. It may vary from country to country. An example of language policy in prison



is the case of Welsh language speakers in the United Kingdom. In 2018, prison staff prevented Welsh speakers from using the language in prison. This brought about some agitation and in a bid to make Welsh speakers feel comfortable in the prisons, the Commissioner of Welsh language, for instance, had to set up a committee to investigate the matter and in its report, a recommendation was made to allow prisoners the opportunity to speak Welsh in prison. This prevention of Welsh speakers from speaking Welsh by wardens in prison was done for fear of inmates planning escape routes or crimes (Board, 2020). In some countries, the choice of one language over another may also be because of the availability of the majority of speakers of that particular language and not a matter of policy. Often, even if policies were made on the use of an official language in prison, the implementation is not enforced due to certain linguistic challenges, hence the use of a variety of languages such as in the case of Nsawam Prisons, Ghana. Interactions with the foreign inmates suggested that English is the official language in the Nsawam Prisons, especially between inmates and wardens, however, often, due to illiteracy, most inmates resort to speaking Ghanaian Pidgin English or local languages.

Gender, the social construct of male and female, is said to play an important role in the use of language. Lomotey and Chachu (2020) explain that language is manipulated when it comes to gender roles and ideologies. This manipulation of language, according to them is seen in how certain concepts are used to uphold gender discrimination in many cultures and across several generations. Although gender is not a focus of this study, we observed that language use and language choice were slightly different for male and female inmates.

Methodology

A purposive sampling was adopted for the study because a background check revealed that all our target respondents were held at Ghana's Medium Security Prisons. The instruments used were a guided questionnaire and interview sessions. These were administered to five Tanzanian inmates in the Nsawam Prisons. With funding support from the Andrew Mellon Foundation, two research assistants were recruited to administer the questionnaires and hold guided interviews with the inmates at the Nsawam Prisons. This was done within five weeks. Prior to the administration of questionnaires, permission was sought from the Director of Prisons through the Regional Director and was granted within two weeks. The interview sessions were done within three weeks. Prior to administering the questionnaires and holding the interviews, the authors visited the Nsawam Prisons to seek the consent of the inmates as well as confirm the number of respondents.

A 60-item questionnaire was administered to each of the five inmates interviewed. The questionnaire had three sections. The first section was to gather the biodata of the respondents. The second section was to investigate the citizenship statuses as well as the language background of the inmates. Other questions addressed had to do with the language choice of the inmates during the legal process, as well as with their fellow inmates and wardens while in incarceration. The final section was to establish whether the language barrier has had any adverse or positive effect on the linguistic abilities of Tanzanian inmates in the short term as well as long term. To ensure anonymity, the respondents' identities were coded. Regarding males, the



study coded them as male 1, male 2 and male 3. The females were coded as female 1 and female 2. These codes were done chronologically according to their ages.

Data Analysis

For the purpose of analysis, the respondents' responses were organised thematically and presented in tables and a descriptive approach was used in analysing them. Thus, through the interpretation of the tables, the research questions were answered by examining how the five Tanzanian inmates in Ghana negotiate language use within the specific domains of the prisons. Two of the three males were between the ages of 31 to 40 years, and one was between the ages of 41 to 50 years. Of the two females, one was between the ages of 31 to 40 and the other one was between 41 to 50 years. In effect, 60% (3/5) of the total population were in their early youthful ages and 40 % (2/5) of the total data chosen were in their late youthful age. This current study confirms Dzahene-Quarshie and Marjie's (2020) assertion that it is usually the youth who often travel outside their home countries to seek greener pastures. Clearly, this is in concordance with findings of other studies on migration (Kunal & Bhagat, 2010; Tubergen & Kalmijn, 2008).

Also, literature on migration (Kunal & Bhagat, 2010; Oucho & Williams, 2019) reports that most married men leave their families behind in search of greener pastures to adequately cater to the needs of their families back at home. In the case of women, most of them happen to be single ladies who are usually recruited by traveling agencies to work as domestic servants in foreign countries. In worst cases, some of these ladies are forced into prostitution by travel agencies. Data on the marital status of respondents showed a similar trend. The data showed that both females were unmarried, and all the males were married.

In terms of education, each of the respondents had at least a basic education and the highest level of education was the Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination. Two out of the three males have obtained a secondary education and only one has basic education. Not even one of the respondents had obtained tertiary education. Out of the two females, one obtained basic education and the other one obtained senior secondary school education, none obtained tertiary education. This is not surprising as studies conducted by Laliberté (2019; Kunal & Bhagat, 2010) on the educational statuses of migrants affirm the fact that often people who migrate are those of low socioeconomic status; usually, they are poor and of low literacy levels.

With regards to children, all five respondents have children. The male respondent who attained between the ages of 41 to 50 years has 4 children. One female between the ages of 41 to 50 has 3 children. The respondents who are between the ages of 31 to 40 years have 1 child each. Those between the ages of 41 to 50 have more than a child. As mentioned earlier, the main reason why most people migrate is to seek greener pastures in order to help their families back at home. However, as it turned out, most of these migrants usually do not assess the labour market of the host countries and so they end up not finding jobs. The lack of job opportunities results in criminal tendencies among migrants in their quest for lucrative jobs that would enable them to provide sustenance to their families back home (Oucho & Williams, 2019).

Citizenship and Migration Statuses of Respondents

Respondents' nationality and place of birth were matched with their occupation. Table 1 below summarises the information.

Table 1
Respondents' Citizenship and Migration Statuses

Respondent (5)	Nationality	Place of Birth	Reason for Coming to Ghana	Occupation
Male				
1	Tanzania	Dar es Salaam	Business	Business
2	Tanzania	Dar es Salaam;	Business	Business
3	Tanzania	Magomeni Ruvuma; border to Mozambique	Business	Gold miner
Female				
1	Tanzania	Dar es Salaam; Temeke	Student: Improve the future for family	Business
2	Tanzania	Dar es Salaam; Kinondoni	For a better job opportunity	Food vendor

Cross-border trade is an economic activity that promotes the movement of people from one region to another in Africa. These activities usually enrich the host country with new products and creativity, which can contribute to economic growth (Oucho & Williams 2019; Yu & Shandu, 2017). As indicated in Table 1, all five respondents are Tanzanians. Four respondents, two males, and two females come from different suburbs of the capital, Dar es Salaam and one male comes from Ruvuma, a town that shares a border with Mozambique. Two of the men are businessmen and one is a gold miner. One of the females is a businesswoman and the other is a food vendor. It is obvious from the data that all of the respondents came to Ghana with one intention which is to do business.

Language Background of Respondents

The respondents' language background was explored. The data on respondents' language backgrounds show that multilingualism is a typical language phenomenon in Africa. Secondly, Tanzania as an African country has a relatively effective language policy such that Kiswahili which is the national and official language of Tanzania is spoken by almost every citizen (Petzell, 2012).

Table 2
Summary of respondents' language background

Respondent s	Ethnic Background	Ethnic Language	National Language	Fluency Level of English
Male				
1	Mluguru	Kiluguru	Kiswahili	Not quite well
2	Ndengereko	Kindengereko	Kiswahili	Not quite well
3	Mngoni	Kingoni	Kiswahili	Quite well
Female				
1	Mngoni	Kingoni	Kiswahili	Quite well
2	Mzaramo	Kizaramo	Kiswahili	Quite well

Table 2 shows respondents' ethnic language backgrounds. Apart from one respondent, the rest speak their ethnic languages, however, all five inmates indicated that their national language, Kiswahili, is their mother tongue. They grew up speaking it and it is their main medium of communication. All of them speak some amount of English except one of the female respondents who speaks no English at all. From the data, it was observed that one female respondent and one male respondent could express themselves quite well in English. Two male respondents said they could not express themselves well in English, although they understood it.

Language Choice and Use during the Legal Process

English is the official language in Ghana (Ansah, 2014; Bodomu, 1995; Marjie, 2021), thus, normally, it is the medium of official communication at the Kotoka International Airport. However, announcements are given in English and French. Beyond English and French, there is usually no arrangement for interpretation into other foreign languages, should the need for interpretation arise. Table 3 below shows the difficulty in communication between Ghanaian immigration officers and travellers from Tanzania who were apprehended at the Kotoka International Airport.



Table 3
Arrival and Medium of Communication

Respondent	Date of Arrival and Apprehension	Number of times in Ghana	Initial Language Used for Interrogation	Level of Understanding	Language of Response
Male 1	11 /2015	Once	English	Not well	English
Male 2	7/ 2019	Once	English	Not well	English
Male 3	7/2015	Twice	English	Quite well	English
Female 1	5/2016	Once	English	Note well	both English and Kiswahili
Female 2	1/2018	Twice	English	Not at all	Kiswahili



The data showed that for three of the respondents, it was their first visit to Ghana, and it was the second time two of them had visited Ghana. They were all apprehended at the Kotoka International Airport upon their arrival as indicated in Table 3. It was evident from the interviews with respondents that law enforcement officers at the Kotoka International Airport do not have Kiswahili interpreters. Therefore, during the process of apprehension of the respondents, the immigration officers communicated with them in English. For most of them this was problematic because even though they understood the officers sufficiently, they could not express themselves well in response to the questions that were posed to them. Thus, as indicated in Table 3, right at the point of apprehension they experienced differing levels of communication barriers. This situation confirms the notion that migrants do not receive messages in the form they understand leading to insecurity and hazards in their lives (Mittal, 2018; Hammer, 2017; Jaeger et al, 2019). Hammer (2017) therefore advises that migrants and refugees should be communicated within a form that they would understand and assimilate.

Interpretation Assistance

Jaeger et al. (2019) suggested that professional interpreters should be made available to migrants during interrogation for effective communication. These interpreters enable defendants to understand proceedings and assist in their own defence. Nada (2017) illuminates that to meet the needs of the individuals and families caught up in these crises, service providers should be able to communicate with those affected in a language and a manner that is accessible, comprehensible, and useful. Table 4 below shows the summary of respondents' views on interpretation assistance given to them.



Table 4

Respondents' views on interpretation assistance

Respondents	Assistance Received	Point of Assistance	Case Heard in Court	Number of times in Court	Request for Interpreter	Rating of the Interpretation
Male 1	Interpretation	Charge Office	Yes	21 times	No	not satisfied
Male 2	Interpretation	Charge Office	Yes	2 times	Yes / 2 times	satisfactory
Male 3	Interpretation	Charge Office	Yes	3 times	Yes / 3 times	satisfactory
Female 1	Interpretation	Charge Office	Yes	3 times	No/ fear of bad interpretation	Unsatisfactory
Female 2	Interpretation	Charge Office	Yes	2 times	Yes	Satisfactory



From Table 4 above, all respondents were given an interpreter and this was done at the charge office. Looking at the scarce nature of interpreters, respondents could not have had the leverage of looking for their own interpreters. It is to note that four out of the five respondents noted that they pleaded guilty at the first hearing of their cases. All of the inmates were heard in court and because they had already pleaded guilty the courts did not have to drag the cases. During the interviews with the respondents, some of them disclosed that they felt that the language barrier created a lot of inconvenience to them although they were offered interpreting services free of charge. From the data, only one respondent appeared in court many times because he insisted on pleading not guilty. One female respondent felt dissatisfied with the interpretation process while the rest were satisfied with the language of interaction and the charges imposed on them. In an interview, she explained that the interpreter who was brought in to assist her was from one of the East African countries but was not proficient in Kiswahili and so, worsened her situation by misinterpreting. She noted that she did not oppose the interpretation when she was asked in the charge room.

Proceedings in Court

Legal language is such that a lay person may need interpretations. It becomes complex for migrants who do not understand the official language of the host countries, not to talk about the terminologies of the legal language. Table 5 below shows the language barrier encountered by the respondents during the court processes.

Table 5

Language barrier experienced in court by respondents

Respondents	Interpretation of Charge	Level of Understanding with interpretation	Level of understanding without interpretation
Male 1	No	No	Quite well
Male 2	None	None	None
Male 3	Yes	Very well	Quite well
Female 1	No	No	Not well
Female 2	Yes	Very well	Not well

From Table 5, it becomes apparent that the charges and proceedings in court were interpreted into Kiswahili for only two of the respondents while the other three confirmed that they did not need assistance with interpretation in court. One of the respondents, Male 2 mentioned that he thought he would understand the court proceedings without the services of an interpreter, so although he was offered the services of an interpreter for free, he declined it. Surprisingly, he claimed that he understood the jury without any challenges when the charges and verdict were read



to him in English. He indicated that later he realized that he did not understand most of the issues that were communicated to him in English. This again brings back the point that when there is a language barrier, often communication with migrants is not effective. Even in cases where the services of interpreters are engaged, sometimes the messages are not passed on fully by the interpreter either deliberately or unintentionally (Mittal, 2018; Nada, 2017). As mentioned above, one female respondent spoke bitterly about her dissatisfaction with the quality of interpretation by the interpreter who was hired to assist her.

Language Choice and Use in Prison

Language choice and use are important to Tanzanian inmates in the Nsawam prisons, considering the highly multilingual nature of Ghana's linguistic landscape. Ghanaian inmates serving terms in prison are from various distinct ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. Similarly, foreign inmates also hail from different linguistic backgrounds thereby making the language ecology even more complex. So, for our respondents, language choice at a specific time depends on a number of factors. Regarding these factors that trigger language choice and use, several have been outlined such as is found in a study conducted by Constatinescu (2015; Van Tubergen & Kalmijn, 2009). These may include but are not limited to setting, interlocutors, and topics. All these three factors highlighted have significant effects on the inmates' language choice and use. The respondents gave various reasons for the choice and use of specific languages in the prisons which are mainly English (language 1), Kiswahili (language 2) or a Ghanaian Language (language 3). Table 6 summarises the narrative.



Table 6
Summary of language choice and use in prison

Respondents	Duration in Prison	Language of Communication with inmates	Reasons for choice of language 1 / English	Reasons for choice of Language 2 Native language	Reasons for choice of Language 3 Ghanaian Language Twi/Ga/Ewe
Male 1	5 years	English / Twi	Preferred choice	Tanzanian inmates	Those who don't speak English
Male 2	7 months	English/ Kiswahili	with other nationals	Tanzanian inmates during meal time	N/A
Male 3	4 years	English / Kiswahili	With Ghanaians and other nationals	Tanzanian inmates	With those who speak Twi
Female 1	3 years 5 months	English / Kiswahili Twi	English	Tanzanian inmates and other East African inmates	Some Twi, Ga and Ewe with Ghanaians
Female 2	2 years	English Kiswahili Ghanaian Language	English	English with inmates, officers, Tanzanians, Kenyans	Twi with some inmates and some officers to show brotherhood



Table 6 above shows data on respondents' language choice and language use in prison. From the data, the highest number of years spent in prison by a respondent was 5 years while the least is 7 months. According to Hammer (2017), length of stay has no positive correlation with language acquisition and usage. Nevertheless, although these respondents have stayed in Ghana for varying numbers of years, they spoke English, Kiswahili, Ghanaian Languages; Twi, Ga, and Ewe but not fluently. They spoke Kiswahili which is their native language with their fellow native inmates (Kenyans and the Tanzanians), and spoke Twi, Ga, and Ewe with the Ghanaian inmates. For example, Male 3 responded that they spoke English and the Ghanaian languages with the Prison officers. This observation confirms Myers-Scotton's (2006) claim that language choice is motivated by the performance of identity and negotiation during social interactions. The inmates indicated that they are learning and speaking the local languages with both wardens and inmates to show solidarity and to seek acceptance. In their ability to learn the languages of the host country, the Tanzanian inmates alluded to being enrolled in formal education. Interactions with the inmates indicated that they have the opportunity to enrol in formal education which is available in the Nsawam Prisons. While two males and one female feel happy about the opportunity to be enrolled in formal education, the other male feels it is not important to further his education. He seems not to have an interest in what is going on around him. Female 2 however says she is not able to make time to take part in formal education due to the unfavourable schedule of her daily chores.

The responses from the inmates regarding enrolment in formal education in the prisons support the claims of Yu and Shandu (2017) that second language acquisition is facilitated through informal social interactions, opportunities available, the desire to be accepted as a member of society, young age, intention to stay in the host country and language intervention via formal education. However, enclaves, ethnic concentration, and old age (65 and above) negatively affect second language acquisition and proficiency due to the limited interaction of migrants with the indigenes. Isphording (2015) also adds that the ability for immigrants to learn languages differs in terms of their experience of everyday language usage, and their incentives to learn the languages of the host country. Such attitudes depict the integration status of the migrant. Isphording's (2015) assertion seems to be in alignment with one of the male inmates who seems not bothered about what goes on around him.

The inmates also indicated that the language of interaction (somehow official) is English. While Kearsse (2011) indicates that a kind of slang is created in prisons elsewhere, it was observed that at least in Nsawam Prisons, new varieties of languages have not yet evolved. However, according to Male 3, some male inmates use Ghanaian Pidgin English (an already developed language) as well as existing local languages.



Mode of Communication with Wardens, Home, and Ghana

Our respondents' description of the mode of communication with the prison officers within the prison environs is a clear indication that their linguistic repertoire is limited. Largely, most of the inmates communicate in English with prison wardens here in Ghana. However, they said they would have used Kiswahili to communicate with prison wardens in their homeland. Currently English is the only language they can communicate in with wardens in Ghana. The inmates revealed that they would have used only Kiswahili with inmates from their hometown in the same prison as them. However, they sometimes use either English or Kiswahili when and where it is necessary, which clearly reveals that these foreign inmates have a lot of language barriers. When asked how they use the languages, that is, Kiswahili or English, two of the males and one female inmate indicated that they use the languages separately and at different times. Only one female said she uses both languages at the same time. We observe also from the interactions with the inmates that the female inmates are usually given the opportunity to use Ghanaian languages with some of the officers when they notice it is impossible to understand what they say. This shows gender disparities at play. Genemo (2021) supports our claim that gender also influences language choice and usage in multilingual settings. In the case of our data, there is a kind of flexibility in language use in the female prison.

Language Barriers and strategies used to overcome them.

When the inmates were asked individually whether they encountered any form of language barrier, 100% responded in the affirmative. They recorded different experiences and domains in which communication barriers were brought to bear. For example, Male 1 said *'Ghanaians speak many languages, Twi, Ga, Hausa and so you cannot finish learning one language before learning the other'*. Male 2 indicated that he had communication issues when he was sick and visited the prison hospital. He stated that *'When we go to see the medical doctor we do not understand each other. so we use signs, and gestures, repeatedly to communicate'*. In the case of Male 3, it was difficult for him to understand other prison mates, so he resorted to the use of gestures. Here is an excerpt from his response; *'we find it difficult to understand each other so we use gestures'*. The females also indicated some linguistic negotiations that they adopted. We observed that female 1 had so many issues right from apprehension to prison. So, when asked whether she used any coping strategies to overcome the language barrier she said *'I am not allowed to speak my native language and so I don't talk much. I just mind my business'*. The last female respondent indicated that she had difficulties when communicating her illness with her doctor. She said *'I face difficulties when communicating with the doctor, I use gestures, touch, and demonstration. Ghanaians are so multilingual, so it is difficult to communicate with them'*.

On the question of coping strategies used to overcome communication barriers with wardens and junior officers, 2 males and one female respondent said that they spoke few specific English words from the Ghanaian languages and used gestures. They however



indicated that when they were so pressed for want of words, they used gestures. When the inmates were communicating with other fellow inmates, they used Ghanaian Pidgin English, signs, and gestures and solicited help from their native siblings who could speak some English words better than they did. Regarding the language of communication with fellow native speakers, all five inmates said they use Kiswahili.

It is obvious from the responses of the respondents that all of them have experienced the negative side of a language barrier in one way or the other. Some of the inmates have difficulties communicating with medical doctors when they are sick because they do not speak English fluently. Some of the inmates also use simple words or simple sentences which usually lack details. The worst of all is when only gestures are used to communicate illnesses to doctors when they are sick. Such situations are a clear indication of the inefficiencies that result in communication policy implementation, as language should not be a barrier to communication. There is a possibility that these gestures would not be sufficient for communicating internal ailments that the patient feels. Once communication is not complete, the wrong medication could be given to these inmates. The findings above are consistent with Jaeger et al., (2019; Yagmur & Fons, 2012) who explained that language barriers negatively affect the health status of migrants since they are unable to communicate their complaints to healthcare staff which would result in low-quality healthcare. Others do not bother to go to the hospitals when they are sick, and this predisposes them to deterioration of their health condition and possibly fatal outcomes. Professional interpreters would therefore be required to facilitate improved health care for migrants who have inefficient communicative functions.

Linguistic Competence in Ghanaian local languages

In terms of respondents' linguistic competence in Ghanaian local languages, the data shows that most of the inmates are building linguistic competence in Ghanaian languages such as Twi, Ga, and Ewe. They communicate in the Ghanaian languages because they feel it makes them belong and it makes them enter into good relationships with both inmates and the wardens (Yu & Shandu, 2017; Laliberté 2019). Some of them are just happy that they are acquiring a new language. We observed that most of them indicated Twi as the first language to learn followed by Ga and Ewe. Almost all of them prefer Twi because they claim the structure is just like their native languages, thus the two languages bear a resemblance. As a result, three of them are acquiring the language formally by attending school. Some also acquire the Ghanaian language informally, thus by speaking the language with friends. Some say they want to satisfy their curiosity, which is why they try to learn and speak a Ghanaian language (Yu & Shandu, 2017).

Importance of Learning Ghanaian Languages

When the inmates were asked about the importance of learning Ghanaian languages, they all responded that it was important to learn Ghanaian languages. They gave the following as reasons for learning the languages.



The Ghanaian languages help them to respond to, carry out and receive instructions quickly and easily. Others too claimed that speaking and learning a Ghanaian language helps them form affiliations with other group members.

In sum, the Ghanaian languages according to the respondents give them a social identity, it helps them to satisfy social demands and helps them keep friends, and these buttress (Yu & Shandu, 2017). Laliberté's (2019; Ramlan et al., 2018) assertion about migrants' integration into the host country. Some claim the Ghanaian language has affected their native languages because they are forced to code switch and code mix, a point Hammer (2017) emphasises, stating that internalisation of the second language makes one mix both mother tongue and acquired language during communication. With time some terms would even be lost.

Impact of Imprisonment on Communication

It is obvious that when movement is controlled, communication is also curtailed. Respondents were asked about the impact of imprisonment on their language. All the inmates said that although their Kiswahili has not been affected because they still speak with the other native inmates, their communication with Ghanaian inmates, prison officers, etc. has been challenged significantly. They are, however, quick to add that they have also learned some English as well some Ghanaian languages such as Twi, although they are not proficient as discussed in the earlier sections. One of the female inmates said she has also learned how to code switch. Another male said he has also started learning Ghanaian Pidgin English which he believes is affecting his proficiency in Standard English adversely. They added that as long as they are in prison and in Ghana, they have no other choice than to do their best to learn the local languages.

Conclusion

The present study was undertaken against the background of a previous study that looked at the various linguistic domains in which East African migrants in Ghana face communication barriers and the strategies they employ to overcome them. The findings of the study confirmed that indeed East African migrants faced communication barriers, especially Tanzanians, predominantly where the linguistic domain of the market is concerned. Given the highly multilingual landscape of the prisons in Ghana and the often communication barriers faced by Tanzanian migrants, this study sought to investigate the communication barriers these inmates encounter right from the point of apprehension to living within the prison yard and the systems put in place to support them, the coping strategies they employ to overcome communication challenges as well as the effects of these on their linguistic abilities.

The study has established that generally Tanzanian inmates face a much more complex communication challenge since their particular situation requires them to deal with various law enforcement agencies, such as the police, officers of the courts, and prison wardens



on the one hand, and fellow inmates on the other hand. One factor which has contributed to this situation is the respondents' relative lack of proficiency in the English language, which is the official language in Ghana and therefore used as the primary medium of communication in public institutions. Although in two out of the five cases interpreters' services were provided to enhance communication, one respondent was dissatisfied with the interpreting service that was offered to her. Within the prison yard, the linguistic landscape is more complex.

Although English is supposed to be the medium of communication between inmates and wardens, often that was not possible. Apart from using gestures, the female inmates were allowed to break the protocol by using a Ghanaian language despite their lack of proficiency, this was not the case with the male inmates. Many of the Ghanaian inmates do not speak English, but one or the other of several Ghanaian languages and with these, the respondents had to overcome communication challenges by using gestures, or interpretation by other inmates in the short term. Since the respondents are serving prison terms up to a maximum of ten years, the long-term strategy they use is to learn the predominant local language, Twi, or some other popular languages such as Ga. Some also took advantage of enrolling in school to learn English in order to improve their proficiency. In effect, there is no structured support system in place where communication challenges faced by foreign inmates are concerned. All respondents except one indicated that the complex linguistic situation they find themselves in has not had an adverse effect on their proficiency in Kiswahili.

Although gender differences played a role in the linguistic choices of these inmates, such as the female inmates enjoying the opportunity to use Ghanaian languages to enhance their communication with wardens, and one of the male inmates learning Ghanaian Pidgin English to build rapport with other inmates, individual preferences for negotiating linguistic barriers were paramount. The findings of the study have brought to light the reality of communication challenges faced by immigrants who get into trouble with the law and the need to address them.

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