

Marginality, subversive language and sex tourism: Multilingual practices at the Kenyan coast

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Abstract

Kenyan beaches are multilingual spaces of encounters between European ‘package tourists’ and African beach vendors, but also play host to the social inequalities and marginalization of the ubiquitous sex tourism business. In contrast to well-researched youth language practices, often understood as playful linguistic trends, young beach boys’ patterns of foreign language acquisition and their multilingual performance at the beaches are based on economic survival and offer a different perspective on multilingual practice: Most of the male sex workers with broad linguistic repertoires undergo a painful process to learn the tourists’ languages, based on experiences of degradation, hostility and shame. The fluid translanguaging practices of marginalized speakers draw from Kiswahili and local Mijikenda languages while also incorporating a vast lexicon from tourist languages. At the same time, they serve a subversive function, evident in the modification of vulgar German lexemes, which allows marginalized sex workers to mimetically “speak back” to their female customers. In my overview paper, I aim to discuss the role of tourists’ languages in emerging translanguaging processes and I intend to investigate the “darker side” of heteroglossic repertoires in the tourism sector; where I claim that multilingual experience is often linked to and reflects marginality, exploitation, and social inequality.

Keywords: Marginality, sex tourism, translanguaging, mimesis, subversive language

1. INTRODUCTION: THE CURRENT LINGUISTIC SITUATION ALONG THE KENYAN COAST

In established dialectological studies and language maps, the Kenyan coast is usually presented as a grouping of separated areas in which different

Kiswahili dialects and Mijikenda languages such as Chidigo, Chinchonyi, Kigiryama are spoken (see for instance Möhlig 1995). However, for more than three decades the socioeconomic situation along the coast has been heavily influenced by patterns of mass tourism, with a strong impact on its infrastructure, architecture, cultural identifications and representations, and modes of

cups, as well as being strategically used by holiday entertainers in the acrobatic and cultural shows held in hotels (see also Nassenstein 2019).

The conversations witnessed along the beach areas not only reflect a high degree of multilingualism, but also offer insights into one of the main businesses at the Kenyan coast: Sex tourism. Sex tourism has drastically increased since the 1980s¹, and involves especially middle-aged and elderly European women frequenting the beaches during their vacation for short liaisons with young Kenyan men, who are paid for their sexual services. The Kenyan workers hope either for short profitable interactions (usually labeled *fucking business* [fokin bizines] or *biashara congressi*), or to marry their client and eventually move to Europe (with a so-called *langseitmzungu*, lit. 'long-time-European'²). The inherently unequal power relationship is evident in the short extract taken from a German weekly newspaper:

In einem rosafarbenen Badeanzug lässt sie sich auf dem Rücken durch das Wasser treiben: eine rundliche Frau Mitte 50, deren Haut gerötet ist von drei Wochen in Diani Beach. [...] Sie trägt lilafarbene Kunstnägel, an ihrem Hals glitzert ein Kettenanhänger mit dem Umriss von Afrika. Vor dem Urlaub hat sie mit dem Programm von Weight Watchers zehn Kilo abgenommen. Zwei hat sie schon wieder drauf, aber "den Sam", sagt sie, "stört das nicht im Geringsten. Der sagt immer: Lang zu!" [...] Als Sam mit wiegenden Schritten aus dem Bungalow tritt, in dem sich Birgit mit ihm eingemietet hat, trägt er einen Rucksack über der Schulter; darin ein paar Kleidungsstücke, die er zur Wäscherei bringen soll. Sam ist Mitte 30, 20 Jahre jünger als sie, ein gut aussehender Kenianer vom Stamm

der Giriama mit langen Rastalocken und entspanntem Lächeln. (Blasberg & Blasberg 2014, *Die Zeit*)

[‘She is floating on her back through the water, dressed in a pink swimsuit: a chubby woman in her mid-50s whose skin is red from three weeks spent at Diani Beach. [...] She has purple artificial nails, around her neck a pendant in Africa shape. Before her vacation she lost ten KG with the ‘weight watchers’ program but regained already two, “but Sam”, she says, “is not bothered by that at all. He always says ‘help yourself/go for it!’” [...] When Sam steps out of the bungalow that she is renting with him, with swaying steps, he carries a backpack on his shoulder, with clothes inside which he is supposed to bring to the drycleaner. Sam is in his mid-30s, 20 years younger than her, a good-looking Kenyan, from the tribe of Giriama (sic) with long dreadlocks and a relaxed smile.’] (my translation)

The sex tourism sector is brutal and relentless: During the conducted field research, the so-called beach boys – who prefer the label ‘beach operators’ as a more positive self-designation (see also Mietzner 2018 for a more detailed discussion) – repeatedly narrated incidents of sexual exploitation and domination. Female customers sometimes demand specific sexual practices, such as performing oral sex, specific sex positions, or SM/bondage practices, which the male sex workers usually first refuse, yet eventually submit to and endure (see also Kibicho 2009: 190 for a pricelist of the sexual services in Kenya). Colonial stereotypes and neocolonial practices are often discursively reproduced in these

interactions (as can also be found in Ulrich Seidl's mockumentary "*Paradies Liebe*"): Numerous women either dream of romantic love, their Kenyan lover's alleged sexual power, the new sexual experience, or intend to try out the "African banana"; a stereotypical reference to their African partner's male sex organ, as cited by Kibicho (2009: 107).

The ubiquitous multilingual practices along the Kenyan coast (see Section 2) are affected and characterized by the unequal customer-client relationships in and around the beach resorts: In analyzing the explicit, vulgar, offensive and degrading terminology learnt through sex work, it can be seen that language acquisition often reflects the painful experience of exploitation (Section 3). Learning and speaking new languages may, therefore, not necessarily be limited to Blommaert & Backus' (2011) listed types of acquisitions (formal vs. informal contexts, encounters with languages etc.), but could also be viewed with negative connotations. In the professional context of tourism, a multilingual communicative repertoire, or the totality of a speaker's resources at his/her disposal (Matras 2009, Lüpke & Storch 2013), is not simply embraced by a speaker but is also *imposed* upon him/her by the predominant socioeconomic structures. As a response to this, male sex workers also make use of the specific translanguaged style as a means of "speaking back" to their female customers and subversively inverting the power relations (see Section 4).³

The situation could be simplistically explained through patterns of language contact, seen from a perspective based on established sociolinguistic traditions (Thomason 2001, Matras 2009). However, this oversimplifies the scenario: Indeed, there exists a contact space between

speakers of different language families (Bantu vs. Indoeuropean), however, the social dynamics of the contact and partial acquisition patterns on both sides need to be taken into consideration. Here, languages are not only "mixed" or "switched", nor does it simply generate a new coastal linguistic practice; in contrast, matters of socioeconomic dependencies, gender differences, (in)equality and ownership need to be considered. This is essential in the attempt to approach and understand the complex encounters and the meaning of translanguaging practices; such as those hitherto labeled as 'Coasti Slang' (Nassenstein 2016) and the simplified Kiswahili acquired by tourists (Nassenstein 2019). Translanguaging is here understood in the sense of García & Wei (2014:2), who define it as an approach "that considers the language practices of bilinguals not as two autonomous language systems as has been traditionally the case, but as one linguistic repertoire with features that have been societally constructed as belonging to two separate languages". This approach, grounded on García's (2009) work on bilingualism and education, addresses the fluid boundaries of a speaker's linguistic repertoire and stands in opposition to established concepts such as codeswitching; which addresses separable and fixed codes. Marginality plays a central role in the 'beach boy' encounters and characterizes both participants: While at first sight male sex workers can be seen to represent the marginalized in the touristic encounters, the female customers in the sex trade, as sex tourists, can also represent marginal protagonists. According to the interviews conducted with tourists and tourist workers, they often have very restricted language repertoires and regularly originate from low social strata

within the German society. Ryan & Hall (2001: 1) emphasize that “the act of sex tourism can therefore be explained as an interaction between two sets of liminal people – but with a difference”. These relationships and their major difference are mainly characterized by economic inequality and linguistic dominance: While female customers impose their sexual requests and sexualized language upon Kenyan service providers, they in turn fulfill the sexual services and adopt the vulgar vocabulary; eventually transforming and modifying these derogatory terms and labels.

While there are a few established language and discourse studies in the context of tourism studies (Jaworski & Pritchard 2005, Phipps 2007, Jaworski & Thurlow 2010), very few focus on non-Northern geographical and cultural contexts (as a sole exception, see Mietzner & Storch 2019). In this regard, my contribution⁴ aims to contribute an overview of young male Kenyans’ patterns of language use and tourist language acquisition. This is undertaken with a particular focus on marginality and multilingualism, both as a painful, liminal experience, and as a way of subversively reclaiming agency in the sex tourism.

THE MULTILINGUAL EVERYDAY: INCLUSION, EXCLUSION AND DEROGATORY LABELS

In order to discuss the coastal speakers’ marginality and their strategies of turning excluding language around, the multilingual interactions that occur on the beaches must be explored. I recorded the conversation (excerpt 1) in

April 2017 at Tiwi Beach (South Coast). It occurred between Amadou, a Kenyan beach boy in his twenties, a fellow Ugandan traveler, and myself. We went for a walk with Amadou, who had just returned from a night out as a tourist-guide in one of the local nightclubs. The day before, he had promised to share with us his view on language and the multilingual practices among the beach boys. Throughout his explanation of how the coastal sex tourism sector works and how a sex worker’s marginality depends upon the search for a relationship with an elderly lady, it becomes evident that English and German, French and to some extent also Kiswahili are constantly mixed in this setting. Furthermore, the acquisition of vulgar words from sex tourists are addressed by Amadou when he is confronted with the research findings collected in the preceding fieldwork sessions. Linguistic learning strategies constitute one part of the business and, consequently, the pattern of acquiring German swear words, offensive language and sexualized vocabulary (altogether “bad language” in Andersson & Trudgill’s 1991 sense), is inevitable.

As can be seen, beach boys (as well as hotel workers, women offering massages, operators of diving schools and workers in the snorkeling/boatride business), acquire tourist languages in order to attract customers and to build up personal yet “fleeting” relationships (Thurlow and Jaworski’s 2010) by focusing on the conative and phatic functions of language (Jakobson). They approach potential tourists and customers with a high degree of multilingual awareness and sleek slogans that exactly match German proverbs or are versatile creative modifications; such as *Auch alte Katze trinke Milch, Milch is’*

Excerpt 1: Conversation with ‘beach boy’ Amadou, Tiwi Beach, April 2017 (A=Amadou/
 NN=Author/UT=fellow Ugandan traveler; tourist languages in Italics, local languages marked
 bold)

- NN At Bamburi, you had all these old ladies, who mostly went after the young people on the beach, it was... weird.
- A (laughs)
- UT Ah, you are laughing?
- A Here it also happens, most of them, most of them. But is not season.
- NN When do they come?
- A December. (laughs)
- UT So, have you also got yourself one?
- A I try. I try... it’s good to have a chocolate baby.
- NN But they are a bit old...?
- A I look for my age-mates. The old... is just for the money. Not for the love, and it’s not fair. Love is... to make love, not for the cash.
- NN Because we were doing [fieldwork] with two guys from Bamburi, there were so many.
- A That is normal, that is normal. You also have them here, hiding. They come down to the beach. They got a nice cars, good house, they got an old woman.
- NN Ah, Kenyans?
- A *Strandjungen* [‘beach boys’]. Beach boys. So, if you tell them ‘ah, let’s go down to the beach’, they can’t. Because they have everything in it, now.
- UT Yeah, their life has changed now.
- A They send him Western [Union] every time, their life is like that.
- NN And you know, the beach boys actually told us that ‘they call us names, they are not very friendly’, apparently the old ones are very tough with them. They want you to dress in a certain way, and they said ‘no, but we call them [the tourists] by the same name’, so they told us these words, like **kubumzen** [‘to fuck’], ...
- A Yeah (laughs).
- NN So, they call them back like this ... I didn’t know that, they told me that. I was surprised.
- A Yah, this *Deutsche*? [‘Germans’].
- NN Yes, German women, because apparently most of these women are German.
- A *Ja*, most of them, *deutsche Leut* [‘German people’].
- UT And they told me, they call them [the old women] *ka-alte* [‘old one’], they call them words like that; and they [the women] teach them all the bad words, the *strandjungen* know all these bad words.
- A Yeah, we learn this, we learn this. All this.
- NN But in Malindi, it’s mostly Italians, but is it the same?
- A Hmm, is it the same? In Malindi it’s only Italians. They speak Italian.
- NN And you, do you speak Italian?

- A Me? No Italian. *Nur Deutsche, immer Deutsche. Weil hier viele Menschen aus Deutschland.* ['only Germany, always Germans. Because here many people from Germany'].
- NN So you speak...?
- A Germany, English, little bit French. *Ein wenig* ['a little'].
- NN *Ah, tu parles français?*
- A *Eh oui, je parle. Pas beaucoup, mais français ça va aussi* ['yes, I speak. Not much but French is also possible']
(A answers phone)
Hello? **Poa. Niambie? Niko hapa ku beach hapa. Poa, ngoje, naja ... ongea na wageni.** (finishes phone call) **Sababu** give me your program. **Makondoni, Malindi itakuwa poa sana ...**
['Hello? Alright. What's up? I'm here at the beach. Ok, wait, I am coming... speaking with tourists. (...) Because give me your program Makondoni, Malindi will be very nice...'].
- NN **Lakini Malindi ni mbali sana.** ['but Malindi is very far away'].
- A **Siyo Malindi, huku Wasini Island.** ['not Malindi, there Wasini Island'] It's not far. It's only one hour by car. **Kwa wewe udecide** ['because you decide'], tomorrow you give me the details.
- UT So how come here are not many beach boys? You are among the only people on the beach who work here [at Tiwi Beach].
- A No, we are about sixty people.¹ Now... have gone home.
- NN And the Maasai, they also live around here? We were wondering, they walk around.. are these real Maasai?
- A No. *plastik-Maasai.*⁵ People call them **hero, hero** is like greeting [in Maa]
- UT Plastic Maasai (laughing). So they are Digo [people; an ethnic group].
- A Also Digos.

für alle Katzen da 'also old cats drink milk, milk is there for all cats'.

This means that Germans, and German-looking tourists, are often directly addressed in German. However, they are commonly also partly approached in Kiswahili, in order to project local expertise to the European interlocutor and create an intimate linguistic bond between the 'indigenous host' and the 'culturally immersed tourist'. This is often paired with the use of prevalent images of the foreignness and Otherness of other tourist nations (Italians, Polish, French). This has the intention of portraying other nations'

tourists as less knowledgeable, less efficient vacationers, as stingy, lazy, racist, or less interculturally empathic. Derogatory labels for other nationalities are often learned from German customers (as they often constitute common labels in colloquial German), or are partly formed from Swahili and English words. Mietzner (2018) describes this practice as a mirrored form of Othering, which builds upon one's own marginal identity and lived experience to create a "fleeting community of practice" (to be kept up only for the length of an extended walk or a conversation). It is strategically used in order to attract customers,

building a relationship between the German-speaking client and customer by excluding *spaghettifresser* (a derogatory label for Italians) and *inselaffen* (a derogatory label for Brits) (see Tab. 1).

The listed derogatory labels are based on existing stereotypes of specific nationalities (as general categorizations of people along national lines), in order to reclaim agency and creating an ‘in-group’ in the moment of speaking (along with addressing tourists in their own language). This can be understood in analogy with the inversion of Othered language (Section “Subversive voices” below) as a strategy of exerting subversive power in an unfortunate business relationship and, of course, as efficient economic strategy.

MARGINALITY AND LINGUISTIC REPERTOIRES: THE DARKER SIDE OF MULTILINGUALISM

Although superficially appearing to be a versatile communicative repertoire, coastal languaging has, without doubt, also a somber tone. A shadow of painful acquisition is cast, as most of the learnt and utilized creative terms, expressions,

gestures and semiotic arrangements (on restaurant menus, T-shirts, sexual client-customer interactions, in digital communication with returned sex tourists etc.) include obscene vocabulary, as well as racialized and degrading language.

Young male Kenyans who work in the beach areas report that, in their work routine, they are often confronted with racist terms, monkey connotations (*Affen*), ascriptions of wilderness (*wilder Löwe* ‘wild lion’), primitivity and Otherness, as well as ostracisms in general. Due to their frequent occurrence in the interactions with mostly female sex tourists, the workers eventually understand the negative terminology they are exposed to during the sexual services they provide. A broad linguistic repertoire therefore not only represents better economic aspirations and a promising future, but can also include and reflect terminology that has been acquired in liminal situations, and in experiences of pain and exclusion. For instance, they acquire much of their language when constantly being reduced to (hyper)sexualized service providers, “pure flesh”, or as merchandise and simple commodities in the sex tourism sector.

Table 1: Labels for nationalities as used by beach boys

| Term | Metalinguistically targeting | Gloss |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| <i>ma-King-George</i> | British tourists | ‘King George’s people’ |
| <i>ma-fucking-George</i> | British tourists | ‘the fucking Georges’ |
| <i>inselaffen</i> | British tourists | ‘island monkeys’ |
| <i>spaghettifresser</i> | Italian tourists | ‘pasta eaters’ |
| <i>ma-comestare</i> | Italian tourists | ‘the eaters’ |
| <i>krokodile</i> | Czech, Polish, Ukrainian tourists | ‘crocodiles’ (due to their alleged laziness) |
| <i>mgoso</i> , Pl. <i>mangoso</i> | all tourists | ‘spider (Swah.)’, used in coastal areas to mean ‘White person, European’ |

In contrast, the conscious process of language acquisition among beach boys takes place at the beach; the so-called “beach academy” concentrating on exchanges of souvenirs against *wörterbooks* [wɔrtəbɔks] (‘language guides’) in petty trade, or is executed in the bedrooms (so-called *grosatsima* ‘large room’ from German *großes Zimmer*) of the all-inclusive resorts or nearby love hotels. In Kibicho’s (2009) study on sex tourism, numerous sex workers explain how they mastered the languages that they need for daily interactions with tourists, and that this fluency is potentially required in order to find a future marriage partner (to begin a new life overseas).⁵

Not only did Sophie speak good English, she also spoke German and rudimentary Italian. She was learning French so that she could have an edge on the ‘French market’, as there had been an influx of French male tourists seeking African women in Kenya’s coastal region, Sophie reported. When asked what she did before entering the sex trade, she smiled, ignored the question, and mumbled that all this talk was ruining her business. Sophie said she was working that day for a K£25 phone card to call her sick mother in central Kenya. (Kibicho 2009: 153)

Knowing languages in the superdiverse beach context is very contradictory to the prospects described by Blommaert & Backus’ (2011). They analyze a European researcher who, based on his mobility and exposure to numerous written, spoken, formal and informally learned languages, gathers linguistic material from 38 languages to reflect the versatility of his repertoire. In contrast, Sophie intends to learn French in order

to serve “the French market”, which can be considered an extremely self-destructive type of language acquisition when considering the workers’ exposure to often liminal and at times violent sexual practices (see Kibicho 2009 for more details). Equally, too much proficiency in a tourist language is also inadvisable as one beach boy explains during a fieldwork session at Bamburi Beach (North Coast), stating 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 a very 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. (Nassenstein 2016: 126)

The acquired terminology also includes words that denote sexual actions, which need to be understood (and employed) as part of the requested service in order to please the customers. According to the collected data, the basic terminology known by sex workers includes the German verbs *bumsen* (‘to bang, to fuck’), *nehmen* (‘to take, to use’), *ficken* (‘to fuck’), *lecken* (‘to lick, i.e. cunnilingus’), *tatschi-tatschi* (‘to touch s.o.’s private parts, to pet’) and *Muschi* (‘female sex’) as well as *Schwanz* (‘male sex’), also with its semantic modification *Schlappschwanz* (‘wimp, weak guy’, lit. referring to a limp male sex). Some of the acquired ‘sexual’ lexemes are then used by beach

boys as empowering strategy and a means of regaining agency, see Section ("Subversive voices"). Sex workers themselves stated how this acquisition works and which languages are more easily learned than others from the sex tourists:

The words, names, all, all, we learn this. From them. Italian, Deutsche, little bit French. [...] Chinese... No beach boy speaks China. Chin chan chung, no, it's very hard. Us, we will speak Digo, when we are around them so they don't understand. (Amadou, interview excerpt, March 2017)

Several beach boys explained they would learn from the *old mamas*, the *omas* [German for grandmothers] the most essential terminology, especially in widespread languages such as German, French, Italian, but that they would equally try to bind themselves to them with the help of witchcraft, by consulting local Mijikenda witchdoctors. Asking for social dependency, love spells and aphrodisiacs, longlasting economic security and practices of language acquisition are all entangled in the requests addressed to witchdoctors. One sex worker stated:

"The voodoo, they [i.e. the beach boys] catch them [i.e. the female sex tourists] with the voodoo. There is a lot of voodoo. Then they give the name of the woman, maybe Veronika, the name is Veronika. 'What do you want this one to do for you?' 'I want this Veronika, wherever she is, to think about me. I want a car, I want her to buy for me, I want a house, so do something for me.' So, there is some sacrifice. A goat. You have to sacrifice a goat.

If the *oma* comes back, every year you have to sacrifice. Many people have voodoo, *waganga*. They have power and these taboos: They can even give you some medicine. You wash [with it] at the beach, if there is a woman without a man, she will come to you." (Anonymous beach boy, interview excerpt, March 2017).

SUBVERSIVE VOICES: COASTI SLANG AND TRANSLANGUED GERMAN

"After I translated what Helga said, Helga snapped angrily at him:

"*Scheiße* [shit] culture! People must

change. That is a very backward Culture."

"Culture is not *Scheiße*," Jackson retorted, laughing.

"Why call culture *Scheiße*?" (Meiu 2017: 121)

The practices of Othering endured by sex workers are transformed into new labels and turned into a translanguaged style. The beach boys' repertoire includes Mijikenda languages, Kiswahili and European tourist languages, of which German is very prominent – similarly to the epigraph, taken from Meiu's (2017) ethnographic notes on a multilingual situation between a German woman and a Kenyan Samburu men, held in English with the repetition of the German term *scheiße* 'shit, crap'.

The acquired sexualized terminology, the derogatory labels and the violent discursive practices are modified and

often relexicalized by coastal sex workers and used in in-group communication (as a concealment strategy), when publicly referring to their elderly female customers and their qualities, as well as to the experiences endured in the course of liminal sexual practices. While most speakers referred to this subversive translanguaged practice as ‘Coasti Slang’ (which I then also used for my 2016 overview paper), some others simply called it *sentensi met swahel*, an assumingly German-sounding version of the English equivalent (i.e., ‘sentences with Swahili’). It is also referred to without a fixed name, which corresponds more fittingly with the fluidity of translanguaging beyond the borders and separations of fixed and named languages (cf. Garcá & Wei 2014). Also, Meiu (2017: ix), in his study of “ethno-erotic economies” in Samburuland, explains that translanguaging constitutes a common practice among his Samburu interlocutors, saying that “often, my informants shifted from one language to another or mixed words from these different languages in the same sentence”. Generally, this translanguaging practice can be understood as a way of marginalized voices “speaking back” to economically dominant sex tourists; based on Spivak’s (1988) influential paper on subalternity. This can be seen as an example of mimesis; a complex twosided reflection: Taussig observes that “[t]he wonder of mimesis lies in the copy drawing on the character and power of the original, to the point whereby the representation may even assume that character and that power” (Taussig 1993: xiii). In the case of coastal sex workers, offensive lexemes and expressions, along with the painful experiences of language acquisition, are modified and filled with new meaning when employed in

criticisms and subversive statements against the hegemonic structures; turning sexual objects into speakers. A “copy” of the female tourists’ linguistic material is used in order to restore male beach boys’ agency and to reject economic dependencies. It constitutes both a genderized style (see Nassenstein 2016) as well as a critical voice in regard to (re)claimed ownership over the beach: Thus, the tourists’ vulgar language no longer uniquely dominates the beach, due to the existence of a powerful copy. Moreover, the use of powerful language can determine or enforce someone’s marginality in comparison to non-marginal states, which dominate hegemonic relations. Due to the re-use of their own language by their ‘service providers’, elderly sex tourists are turned into marginal actors in the encounters. Ryan & Hall (2001: 6) refer to the “paradox about the state of marginality” in sex tourism settings, which Kasl (1989) explained as “the dialectic between powerlessness and power”. Power is commonly executed and assured through money in these encounters⁷, and through language use.

As a linguistic strategy that turns power relations around, this language style makes use of negative labels and a range of languages to verbally categorize the elderly women; including such labels as *manyama* (lit. ‘animal’, Swah.), *mgoso* (lit. ‘spider’; a coined term for any White tourist), *kiruka-njia* (lit. ‘the one flying over the path’), *kamama* (‘small mother’) and, based on the acquired German lexicon, *kaalte* [kaʔalte] (‘small old one’, from German *Alte*), as well as *kafrau* [kafrawu:] and *alteman* for an old lady or man respectively. Recently arrived tourists, who have not yet established relationships with sex workers, are often called *noya* (from German *neu* ‘new’), *chicken meat*, *hajaharibika* (lit. ‘the one

who is not yet spoilt’) or *bado-ana-barafu* (lit. ‘(s)he still has ice’, referring to one’s pale skin color).

Along with establishing creative names, translanguaging, i.e. “the deployment of a speaker’s full linguistic repertoire” (Otheguy et al. 2015: 281) is also a core feature of the language used by sex workers. This especially includes sexualized vocabulary, such as the English *fuck*, which is turned into the verb *kufucki*. Another example is the German *bumsen* (‘to fuck, to bang’), which is transformed into *kubumzen* [bumzən] with an infinitive prefix from Kiswahili, or to *kubumziwa* [bumziwa] with a passive suffix *-w-* and *a* as a semantic extension. While *kubumzen* is used to denote vaginal sex, *kubumziwa* is used when speaking about customers who favor anal practices and is therefore inherently stigmatized (as anal intercourse is widely considered a taboo in coastal Kenya). Pointing toward such customers and mentioning the verb *-bumziwa* involves a high degree of criticism or even disgust, and

stresses a speaker’s negative stance in an interaction (see also ex. 4)

In these contexts of highly multilingual touristic interactions, the entire presence along the beaches focuses on establishing commercial relationships and finding potential customers. Both host and tourist languages meld into one trans-semiotic system that includes all of the beach’s languages, the semiotic landscapes and the fluidity of multilingual encounters. As can be seen in the examples, language boundaries no longer matter, as both Kiswahili and German terminology are acquired in the sex business and are employed to the same extent in order to describe, address or talk about the European customers. The following sentences are an extracted subset from recorded conversations (in 2015 and 2017), which show the creative use of German, English, Kiswahili and other language material in the emerging translanguaging practices (see examples 1-8).

- (1) *Mprobieren kama atakubali tuimahan!*
 mprobieren kama a-ta-kubali tu-i-mahan
 try:IMP if SM_{3SG}-FUT-accept OM_{1PL}-OM₉-do
 ‘Try whether she will agree to do it with us!’
- (2) *ile mgoso anakuja kwa fucking business*
 i-le m.goso a-na-kuja kwa fucking business
 PP₉-DEM3 NP₉,tourist SM_{3SG}-PRG-come for sex.tourism
 ‘that tourist has come for sex tourism’
- (3) *Kaalte bado ana barafu – angaliya oranges!*
 ka-alte bado a-na barafu – angaliya oranges
 NP₁₂-old.woman still SM_{3SG}-have NP₉,ice look.at:IMP breasts
 ‘The new (tourist) is all white/has just arrived. Look at the breasts!’
- (4) *alteman alibumziwa*
 alteman a-li-bumz-iw-a
 old.man SM_{3SG}-PST-penetrate-PASS-FV
 ‘the old man got penetrated anally’
- (5) *Hero, mnyama anakuita!*
 hero m.nyama a-na-ku-it-a
 Maasai/Samburu.man NP₉,animal SM_{3SG}-PRG-OM_{2SG}-call-FV
 ‘(Plastic) Maasai! The old sex tourist is calling you!’

- (6) *kuku wa gradi alimiona na kiruka-njia*
 kuku wa gradi a-li-ni-on-a na kiruka-njia
 hotel.worker SM_{3sc}-PST-OM_{1sc}-see-FV with old.sex.tourist
 ‘the hotel worker (lit. ‘laying hen’) saw me with an old woman/sex tourist’
- (7) *kale kafrau hajaniþa zile geldi zangu*
 ka-le ka-frau h-a-ja-ni-p-a geldi zi-angu
 PP₁₂-DEM₃ NP₁₂-woman NEG-SM_{3sc}-NEG:PRF-OM_{1sc}-give-FV money PP₁₀-POSS_{1sc}
 ‘that old/shabby woman has not given me my money’
- (8) *ile ni geshaftimaken ya strande*
 i-le ni geshaftimaken i-a strande
 PP₉-DEM₃ COP sex.business PP₉-CON beach
 ‘that is the sex business (from German *Geschäfte machen*) at the beach (*Strand*)’

If language boundaries still played a central role, Kiswahili or Mijikenda languages would most likely be used when critically speaking about sex tourists (in order to conceal the criticism), and German would be used when engaging in interaction with tourists. Excerpt (1) shows that Kiswahili is in a fluid state of adaption; combining with other linguistic resources to address tourists (myself in the recording situation, but commonly heard). ‘Beach boys’ know that numerous tourists want to acquire a range of Kiswahili expressions and therefore intend to teach tourists the basics; one of the many strategies used to create intimate relationships and sell a service or item.

The emerging multilingual practices are bound to specific spaces: While the fluid translanguaging of tourist and local languages is typical of the beach areas, this is not the case in the mostly Islamic city center of Mombasa, where such transgressive language would be frowned upon. This contrasting context explained in Otsuji & Pennycook’s (2010) concept of ‘metrolingualism’, where language is used on a multilingual playground, in their work often related to cities. On the beaches, however, the multilingual play and the inclusion of multiple semiotic signs is less “playful”, and instead address a relentless and violent business

sector that is built upon the production of marginality (see also Ryan & Hall 2001). Somebody’s marginalized state of being powerless is, however, negotiated through the creative use of language and can be altered.

As the examples also reveal, fluid translanguaging is both a reflection of lived misery and degradation, as well as being subversive and very agentive, with very divergent language ideologies. The same semiotic signs, the same lexemes and the same vulgar terms are used in response to tourists in order to reclaim agency. Proficiency or perfection do not play a role (in contrast to situations when addressing or approaching potential customers) and the translanguaged output often reflects a high degree of linguistic creativity, along with messiness; which is not uncommon in creative language (cf. Jones 2018).

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS

By shedding light on the social meaning of different actors’ (tourists; sex workers) linguistic practices and translanguaging, my work intended to provide an overview of the relatedness of language and unequal power relations on Kenyan beaches. Hegemonic dominance is based on the pejorative terminology that beach

boys are addressed with and forced to acquire in sexual services, but which they also reproduce and project onto their often disliked female customers, or tourists of other nationalities. These examples of Othering practices in the tourism sector are a part of the prevalent exclusionary worldwide phenomenon (see also Picard & Di Giovine 2014). In the Kenyan setting, language, as a mimetic and subversive practice, turns into a powerful tool of creating or ousting ascriptions of otherness and marginality.

In contrast to most studies, the multilingual communicative repertoires appear as a burden in the analyzed setting, due to the inherent reflections on marginal experience, pain and exploitation; the languages used in daily interactions are associated with inequality. Here, languaging practices serve as a mirror of hostile interactions entangling both tourist languages and host languages. While a lot has been reported about the positive aspects of broad communicative repertoires, in very few cases has there been a discussion on the speakers' marginality and marginalization. When explored, it is usually only in the fresh field of 'raciolinguistics' (Alim, Rickford & Ball 2016), or with regard to the many languages of refugees with a background rooted in conflict migration.

The strong postcolonial, and at times neocolonial connotations of power, domination and tourism are tangible in the Kenyan sex tourism sector. They are also addressed by Tucker & Hall (2004: 187) in their seminal work on postcolonial tourism, asking: "[H]ow [and we might add to what extent] do present-day tourists, whether Westerners or not, negotiate, dismantle, resist or sustain the colonial elements of contemporary travel discourse and industry in their travel practices?" A further and more

profound analysis of language and the social dynamics of guest-host encounters in the Kenyan coastal tourism may help to answer this question.

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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-----------------|---------------------------|
| CONN | connective |
| COP | copula |
| DEM3 | demonstrative (remote) |
| FUT | future tense |
| FV | final vowel |
| IMP | imperative |
| NEG | negation |
| NP ₁ | nominal prefix of class 1 |
| OM | object marker |
| PASS | passive voice |
| PP | pronominal prefix |
| PRF | perfect aspect |
| PRG | progressive aspect |
| PST | past tense |
| SM | subject marker |

ENDNOTES

1. For a more general overview of sex tourism and its historical development, see Ryan & Hall (2001).
2. This is originally derived from German *lange Zeit*, as a direct calque from the English expression ‘long time’ as a greeting formula when two friends have not seen each other for a while. *Mzungu* is Kiswahili and means ‘White person, European’.
3. However, the linguistic dimensions of sex tourism are not necessarily restricted to female customers: Old male Europeans preferably reside in the shabby town of Mtwapa, only a few kilometers north of Mombasa, which is the chosen domicile of more than 300 male German pensioners. This multilingual setting, with a very visible German presence in the semiotic landscapes around the red-light spots (such as the popular bar *Bahnhof* situated along the main road in Mtwapa) are also neatly intertwined with discourses on witchcraft; as a powerful reclamation of Kenyan female sex workers’ subversive agency in the German-dominated spaces. This will still be subject to a separate study.
4. The present paper is based on several weeks of ethnographic fieldwork along Bamburi and Tiwi Beach in 2015 and 2017, mostly with male sex workers but also predominantly German tourists, hotel staff and beach vendors. I am considerably grateful to my interlocutors Wilson, Tela and Amadou, as well as to many of their peers in the tourism sector. Anne Storch is warmly thanked for generously funding my research trip in 2017, and for her valuable feedback. I am indebted to Angelika Mietzner for her permission to use her data and unpublished material, and to Steffen Lorenz for numerous critical comments during the production of the text. A first version of this work was presented at the International Congress of Linguists in Cape Town, July 2018. I am grateful to the editors of this special issue for their feedback, advice and patience, as well as for two anonymous reviewers’ detailed comments, and to Kieran Taylor for improving my English. As a general disclaimer, I would like to stress the fact that all shortcomings are my own responsibility. I am aware of the fact that linguistic research in the context of sex tourism is a debated and highly controversial topic; I assure the reader that all the research participants’ anonymity has been guaranteed and that the conducted fieldwork was based on common ethical standards.
5. It has to be added that Tiwi Beach ranges among the smaller beach strips of the South Coast. There is only one major resort (Tiwi Amani Beach Resort) and a cottage rental situated along the beach which stretches only a few hundred meters. Sixty beach boys may be the maximum capacity of touristic operators that the restricted area may be able to support.
6. Amadou’s explanation of ‘fake’ Maasai vendors is based on the fact that, after Corinne Hoffmann’s (2005) popular novel “The White Masai”, beach boys dressed as Maasai were extraordinarily successful in business. More and more Kenyans from other ethnic backgrounds therefore began to disguise themselves as Maasai, with long red scarfs, checked traditional dresses and rubber sandals, among them also many Digo people who live on the South Coast. As pointed out by an anonymous reviewer, Meiu (2009) mentions that “modern” Samburu Morans are called “plastic” Morans. One may wonder whether the expression has found its way from Samburu land to the coast.
7. Moreover, money and power are not always commensurable and do not represent an equal measure: Meiu (2017: 164) explains that the money obtained through the sex business can be perceived as bewitched and thus rejected, and states that “the money took over the qualities and substance of the things for which it was exchanged”, according to Samburu beliefs.