TRADING WITH LANGUAGE BARRIERS: A CASE OF COMESA MARKET IN ZAMBIA

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Abstract

This article focuses on the language barriers, a case of COMESA market in Lusaka, Zambia. The aim of this article was to explore the perspectives and experiences of the traders at COMESA market regarding the effects of language barriers within their trading and communication process. Therefore the study sought to find out what language is used when trading, what challenges are faced if any when trading and how they overcome these challenges. The Phenomenological methodology guided the study. The findings revealed that mostly Nyanja and Bemba were used for trading while English was only used for Zimbabweans, South Africans and Caucasian. The most common challenge was the inability to communicate with customers who may be interested in their products. As a result the trader may use signs to communicate, that is, pointing to their products or showing pictures, in other instances, the trader mixed languages in order to overcome the language barrier.

Keywords: COMESA Market, Language barriers, Nyanja, Bemba and Phenomenology methodology.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

According to [1], COMESA comprises 21 African Member namely Burundi, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, Sudan, Swaziland, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe, that came together with the aim of promoting regional integration through trade and the development of natural and human resources for the mutual benefit of all people in the region.

It also states that COMESA was initially established in 1981 as the Preferential Trade Area for Eastern and Southern Africa (PTA), within the framework of the Organisation of African Unity’s (OAU) Lagos Plan of Action and the Final Act of Lagos. The PTA was transformed into COMESA in 1994. The PTA was established to take advantage of a larger market size, to share the region’s common heritage and destiny and to allow for greater social and economic co-operation.

COMESA has its headquarters in Lusaka, Zambia.

In line with the objectives of COMESA, there is a diverse and multi-cultural Market that enables traders from various countries to sell their goods in Lumumba Road, Lusaka. This was the area of focus of the study.

1.2. The Aim of the Study

The purpose of this study is, to explore the perspectives and experiences of the traders at COMESA regarding the effects of language barriers within their trading and communication process.

1.3. Research Question

I. What language do they use when trading?
II. What challenges if any do they face when communicating and trading?
III. How do they overcome these language barriers?
1.4. Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

Using a qualitative approach to research typically indicates a smaller number of participants and the assumption that the results cannot be generalized. Qualitative research does not collect numeric data from a representative sample of the target audience; as such, it does not use statistical analysis to estimate the level of opinions expressed by participants as a reflection of a larger population of the sample.

However, this does not affect the validity of the study. [2] suggested that validity is plausible, credible, trustworthy, and therefore defensible. [3] indicated that validity has more to do with the information richness of the cases and participants selected than with the sample size.

1.5. Definitions

Culture refers to the system of understanding characteristics of that student’s societal background. This system of understanding includes language, values, concepts of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, and other socially constructed ideas that members of the culture are taught are true [4].

Cultural and language barriers indicate the difficulties faced when people without a culture and language in common attempt to communicate with each other [5].

Language comprehension is the ability to connect to and interpret both oral and written language [6].

1.6. Bio Data

There are thirty-five respondents; fourteen females and twenty-one males. Out of the thirty-five; 6 were below 25, 13 between 26-40, 13 were between 41-55 and 6 were above 55. Six (6) have been in the market less than 5 years, twelve (12) less than 10 years, twelve (12) less than 20 years and six (6) for more than 20 years.

The respondents included: 18 Zambians, 3 Ugandans, 8 from DRC, 5 from Tanzania and 1 from Burundi. Who traded Restaurant, shoes, cigarettes, Liquor, clothes, tailoring, suit cases, wheel barrow pusher, Masai hair plaiting, baby clothes and traditional jewelry.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Design

A qualitative design, specifically phenomenology, was used in this study. Phenomenological methodology allows the researcher to focus on the details of the lived experience of participants. "The key element of a phenomenological research study," according to [2], “is that the researcher attempts to understand how people experience a phenomenon from the person’s own perspectives and experiences” (p. 46).

2.2. Data Collection

A one-on-one semi-structured interview method was used, which allowed the interviewer to enter into the inner world of participants and to gain an understanding of these interviewees’ perspectives. The participants’ information will be shared with no one. All of the participants’ privacy and confidentiality of interview information will be destroyed upon completion of the project.

2.3. Data Analysis Process

Data analysis in this qualitative research began soon after the data collection started. The process of data analysis included the following stages: reading, describing, classifying, and interpreting the data. The reading stage involved a close reading through the text and making margin notes. The describing stage illustrated the meaning of the experience for the researcher. The classifying stage uncovered and listed emerging patterns of meaning for participants and then grouped the patterns into meaning themes.

The interpreting stage developed a textural description (what happened), a structural description (how the phenomenon was experienced), and an overall description of the experience. Data collection and data analysis usually go together. Creswell (1998) suggested the most important work of the qualitative researcher is to establish patterns and look for a correspondence between two or more categories. The process involves (a) recognizing the identification of patterns, (b) generating tentative explanations for...
### Table 1: Language used for trading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PHRASE</th>
<th>LANGUAGE</th>
<th>BACK TRANSLATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Bwela Customers</td>
<td>Nyanja and English</td>
<td>Come customer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Bwelani Mu Oneko</td>
<td>Nyanja</td>
<td>Come and see</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Iseni Mumoneko</td>
<td>Bemba</td>
<td>Come and see</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Mommy/Daddy</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Mommy / daddy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Mufunaka ka bala</td>
<td>Nyanja</td>
<td>Want a wheel barrow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Wateja</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Sister ku manga sisi</td>
<td>Nyanja and English</td>
<td>Sister plait your hair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Sister Bwela</td>
<td>Nyanja and English</td>
<td>Sister come</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Its one to one adversting</td>
<td></td>
<td>Depends on the customer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Yes boss/Bwelani boss</td>
<td>Nyanja and English</td>
<td>Yes boss come boss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Customer Bwela ugule</td>
<td>Nyanja and English</td>
<td>Customer come and buy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Iseni mumeko ama sample</td>
<td>Bemba and English</td>
<td>Come and see sample</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Iseni ba customer</td>
<td>Bemba and English</td>
<td>Come customer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Bwelani muoneko original mummy/daddy</td>
<td>Nyanja and English</td>
<td>Come and see original</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Nsapato yokosa</td>
<td>Nyanja</td>
<td>Strong shoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Mommy bwelani muoneka katundu</td>
<td>Nyanja and English</td>
<td>Mommy come and see</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Fikani a customer daddy/Mommy</td>
<td>Nyanja and English</td>
<td>come customer mummy and daddy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Hello mommy mufunako chani-traditional jelwery</td>
<td>Nyanja and English</td>
<td>Hello mum what do you want</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 Bwela mwana wanga</td>
<td>Nyanja</td>
<td>Come my child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 Bwelani mu one vokudywa</td>
<td>Nyanja</td>
<td>Come and see food</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

3.1. Language used for trading

The following languages were spoken by respondents included: Nyanja, Swahili, Bemba, English, Luganda, French, Mambwe, Tumbuka, Tonga, Lingala, Lunda and Lozi. The most frequent language used for communication was Nyanja with all respondent using it, seconded by Swahili with 18 out 35, then Bemba with 7 using it and only 5 using English. It is important to note that English was only used when the customer was a Zimbabwean, South African or white. Additionally, it was noted that traders who had worked in the market for more than 10 years were able to communicate with customers in Nyanja and Bemba as they had had a lot of interacts with the Nyanja.
and Bemba speakers. Furthermore, the findings showed that most traders would call customers to their stand as exemplified in the table below. It is important to note that most of traders used respectful words to call the customer. For example most traders opted to include ‘Mu’ or referred to them as Boss, Mommy Daddy and Sister. However, the alcohol traders stated that they did not need to call customers, as most would simply come and buy.

3.2. Challenges faced when trading and how they are overcome

The most common challenge faced was the inability to communicate with customers who may be interested in their products. As a result the trader may use signs to communicate, that is, pointing to their products or showing pictures, there by enabling the customer to do the same. If this fails the trader may then look for an interpreter to help them at no cost.

In other instances, the trader may mix languages in order to overcome the language barrier.

4. CONCLUSION

This paper has shown the languages used when trading at COMESA market, Lusaka and highlighted, that, language and culture play a critical role in trading especially when attracting customers to ones stall as noted that the aspect of respect was included. Even though the traders faced communication challenges they were able to overcome them by mixing languages, pointing or showing pictures or finding someone who knows how to speak the language the customer is using at no cost.

References
