Intonation in Advice-Giving in Kenyan English and Kiswahili

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Abstract

We examine salient prosodic features used in advice-giving in Kenyan English and Kiswahili from a radio phone-in programme. Our pilot corpus constitutes 40 sequences taken from *The Breakfast Show*, a Kenyan radio phone-in aired on Classic 105 fm. Although the programme is moderated in English, advice is given in both English and Kiswahili, since Kenya is highly multilingual with frequent code-switching. In this paper, we focus on the pragmatic strategies of expressing advice involving forms that furnish the recipient with little optionality in carrying out the suggested action, including, imperatives, declaratives with modal verbs, and conditional forms. In both languages, we observe a terminal falling intonation in advice-giving. However, whilst the global pitch contours in Kenyan English follow a marked downtrend for expressing advice in imperative, declarative and conditional forms, interpreted as a downstepping sequence of H* accents, those in Kiswahili have alternating rises and falls, suggesting a more elaborate intonational phonology. In instances of code-switching, imperative forms of advice generally reveal alternating rises and falls. This pattern is also found in declarative and conditional forms, although with a greater pitch range. These preliminary findings are useful in applications such as identification of language and variety, especially in multilingual interactions.

Index Terms: advice-giving, radio phone-ins, intonation, Kiswahili, Kenyan English

1. Introduction

Advice-giving is particularly interesting for prosodic analysis because it is an overtly normative activity where a person describes, recommends, or otherwise *proposes* a preferred course of action, and these forms of advice are largely differentiated through the speakers' prosody. In Kenya, giving advice is an activity that can be found in the domain of radio broadcasting. In this highly multilingual country, code-switching is a natural aspect of language behaviour, and permeates many spheres of interaction, including the domain of radio broadcasting. Code-switching has been defined as the "juxtaposition of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems within the same exchange" [1, pp. 1] or simply "the use of two or more languages in the same conversation" [2, pp. vii]. Kenya boasts approximately 68 living mother tongues [3], and utilises both English and Kiswahili as co-official languages and linguae francae, with a widely used urban mixed variety, Sheng. The prosody of these under-resourced languages and varieties has been scarcely addressed [4], [5], [6], [7]. What we do know is that Kenyan English show less durational reduction of unstressed syllables compared to most mainstream English varieties [4]. Moreover, Kenyan English has influence from the first language (L1) pool in both reading and speech in interview sessions [5], where for instance statements predominantly have either a nuclear rise-fall (L*+H L%) or fall (H* L%) in both groups, depending on the presence or absence of prenuclear material, respectively. In [7], the acrolectal black Kenyan English vowel system not only reveals L1 influence, but also a trend towards a seven vowel system with two front and two back mid vowels. Moreover, studies on Kiswahili have concentrated on the prosody of the Tanzanian variety rather than that of Kenya [8], [9], [10], [11], [12], where [9] addressed intonation of different sentence types, and [13] transcribed natural dialogue, making additional note of intonation. In [11], like other Bantu languages, Tanzanian Kiswahili has 'boundary narrowing' where a phonological phrase boundary must follow the focused element. The remaining elements of the sentence are parsed into separate phonological phrases, with no prosodic equivalent of accent reported on the focus phrase. Scant literature on the prosody of Kenyan Kiswahili shows that for the dialect spoken in Nairobi, rather than that spoken in Tanzania [12], changes in word order affect sentence intonation, but there were no examples where intonation alone marked focus [12]. Finally, prosodic features of Sheng are yet to be documented.

In Kenya, the language of the media has been stipulated by national policy, with individual channels designated for either use of local language(s), or the use of the co-official languages. Public radio stations in Kenya mostly cover the cities, and their programmes attract a multilingual receivership. Thus, it is inevitable to find code-switching in radio phone-in programmes involving (Kenyan) English, (Kenyan) Kiswahili, local languages and Sheng. This paper is concerned with intonation in a radio phone-in programme in which the stipulated language for this programme is English, the language used predominantly by the host. Despite this, advice is given not only in English but also in Kiswahili. We focus on imperative, declarative and conditional forms of advice.

2. Prosody and pragmatics of expressing advice

In mainstream varieties of English [6], accents can be arranged "so as to obtain a climactic effect on words and expressions whose emotive force calls for it" [13, pp. 77]. This is especially pertinent to advice-giving, which is a highly emotive endeavour. Bolinger states that, "a large part of the emotive force on an intonation resides in how much material

is *down* with reference to the rest, and how much is *up*" [13, pp. 140]. Additionally, in advice-giving:

"Not only may the accent – under the influence of climax - fall on a syllable for which there is no separate-focus reason to put it there, it may also fall on a syllable for which there is a positive reason not to put it there, given the literal meaning of the whole." [13, pp. 79].

Further, [14] also states that advice is usually accompanied by falling intonation because it contains a degree of authority on the part of the speaker. Worth mentioning, however, is that defining advice as a speech act is complex, as it can be a directive or a request for an action that will benefit the hearer [15]. Since advice is viewed as an intrinsically face-threatening act (FTA), it can often be given through indirect speech acts [16]. This means that advice can be implicitly given through rhetorical questions, proverbs, warnings or suggestions. A suggestion, for instance, takes a rise which, by its very nature, allows the other person to have the final decision [14]. Furthermore, [14] states that warnings, like suggestions, also use a rise and that, although the speaker is doing the warning, it is the warned person who has to take the decision. The speaker acknowledges this with the choice of this rising tone. If the lexical verbs *suggest*, *warn*, and *advise* are explicitly used by the speaker, they are likely to be indicated by falls [14].

However, the literature reports that especially the performative use of the verb *advise* is rare [17]. Of importance to note is that indirect speech acts are aspects related to face-enhancing acts in politeness [16], and manifest more in advice-giving on the radio, especially when the advisees do not specify the kind of advice they anticipate. There is a whole gamut of linguistic realisations of advice-giving, distinguished based on different sentence types. These include the use of imperatives, interrogatives, declaratives, agentive and non-agentive sentences, and conditional sentences [18], [19]. Our exploration of prosody in advice-giving will focus on imperatives (such as a command, an instruction or a request inviting an action), declaratives (suggesting an action), and conditional sentences (making the advice relevant for a particular target group). While imperatives and declaratives are pragmatic strategies that express direct advice and conditional linguistic realisations express conventionally indirect forms of advice [20], the difference between direct and indirect advice depends on the strength of the forms used to express it [21]. For example, forms such as "You must", "You should", "You'd better" and imperatives would be categorised as direct advice and other forms such as "You can/could", "You might want to" and "It may/would be a good idea to" could be categorised as indirect advice.

3. Radio phone-ins as spaces for advising

Radio phone-ins - a participatory media format where listeners of a radio programme can call in and discuss a particular topic with the radio host and/or studio guests - have become increasingly common across the globe. In [22], for instance, a scheme of how phone-in programmes function has been provided, see Figure 1. According to this communication scheme, there are several aspects of communication between the principal phone-in participants - Host, Guest, Caller and Audience - that can be studied. There is an aspect of asymmetry of roles in advice-giving and receiving in radio phone-ins which make the format of particular interest.
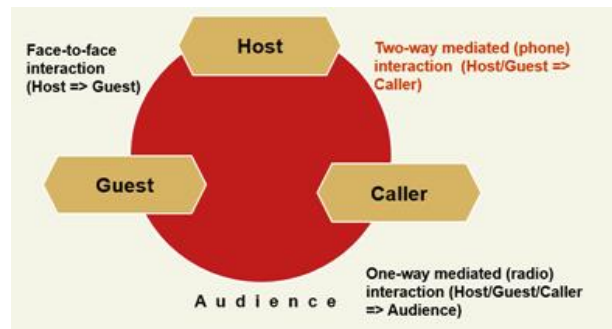

Figure 1: *Communication Scheme of phone-in programmes [22, pp. 353].*

These interactions encompass more than just a private dialogue between an advice-seeker and an advice-giver. It is an active public discourse that, in different ways, may involve various categories of participants: non-expert advice-seeking host, non-expert advice-giving guest, advice-giving caller, and the listening audience. In this study, we focus on the speech of the non-expert advice-giving caller and the advice-seeking host, who acts on behalf of an anonymised caller. Adopting Ferenčík's [22] communication structure, this paper dwells on the "two-way mediated (phone) interaction between the host and the caller in advice-seeking and advice-giving, respectively. These participatory media formats provide for a relatively casual setting, where people use fairly natural language in public forums for unscripted talk and discussion, which constitute a rich source of data for the study of prosody, style-shifting and code-switching, among others.

Advice-giving is a complex speech act that is often essential in participative broadcasting formats. In fact, many phone-ins offer counsel on matters of health, sex and relationships, which are considered taboo in the Kenyan context, or on topics that are considered controversial. Such matters relate closely to politeness theory [16]: in various studies, within the range of interactions in which advice is sought and offered, the potential loss of face is intrinsic. Whereas advice recipients might feel 'less knowledgeable' than advice-givers, advisers may feel rejected if their advice is not accepted, thus both can suffer 'loss of face' [16], [23], [24], [25], [26]. The consequences of losing face are different in each encounter and losing face when interacting with family and friends may not be as detrimental to the individual as compared to public forums such as on the radio. Though pertinent, a deeper analysis of the topic of face is beyond the scope of this work.

4. Data and methods

Using purposive sampling, the data for this article was taken from a collection of approximately 40 advice-giving items taken from a Kenyan radio phone-in programme, *The Breakfast Show,* on Classic 105 fm. This programme is aired from Monday to Friday from 6 am to 10 am. On this programme, interlocutors switch between English, Kiswahili and Sheng. Transcription of the excerpts to show advice in context follows these labels: (a) MOD represents the host, (b) 1st CL_M represents first caller in the show, male, (c) 1st CL_F is the first caller in the show, female, (d) 2nd CL_M represents the second caller in the show, male, and so forth. A translation of the data into English is provided in italics, and areas where advice is given are underlined. The recorded data was analysed and annotated using PRAAT [27]. Annotation

levels include: (1) transcript in the original language, (2) translation into English (in cases of Kiswahili and code-switching), (3) the syntactic form of advice. The extracted segments for analysis constitute instances that reveal different syntactic forms of advice produced by both male and female callers. Although the F0 curves showed that the quality of most recordings was relatively poor due to low signal levels, strong low-frequency drift, background noise (thermal and environmental) and distortion that are often unavoidable in radio phone-ins, we were able to extract F0 contours from non-overlapping utterances in most cases As expected, there were instances of pauses, hesitations and repairs that accompany spontaneous speech, particularly in emotion-provoking contexts like the ones under scrutiny. The F0 contours here are presented and analysed using a contour-based approach anchored on the assumption that intonation contributes both to the interpretation of individual utterances and to utterances in discourse. The representation of the intonation is based on auditory and observed features of F0 contours and depicts phonologically distinct properties of accentedness (in the case of English), pitch height and pitch movement. A very preliminary autosegmental metrical analysis is suggested as a first attempt to characterise the contours and their relation to each other.

5. Results and discussion

The following results provide prima facie illustrations of the type of intonation used in a specific context in Kenya. The objective of the analysis was to show the intonational constructions of different syntactic forms of advice in Kenyan English, Kiswahili and instances of code-switching whilst advising on taboo or sensitive topics in radio phone-ins. Some example situations for this research were: (a) Kenyan women sought advice on what they can do to keep their men loyal (b) Someone had witnessed a "romantic crime" happening with his friend's fiancée and sought advice on whether to tell his friend (c) A woman asked whether she should be bitter after her husband has married two other women (d) A woman asked whether, when going through a divorce, she should leave with the money she contributed to the marriage and still ask for child support (e) Another woman asked whether she should tell her husband after 16 years of marriage that he is not the biological father of their 15-year-old child (f) Should men put their financial assets in their wives names? From these and other examples, the data reveals that there is an intonational difference (summarised in Table 1) in expressing advice in different syntactic forms varying across the languages under investigation.

Table 1: *Summary of global F0 characteristics in advising.*

Form of advice	Kenyan English	Kiswahili	Code-switching
Imperatives	Downstepping trend	Alternating rise and falls	Alternating rise and falls
Declaratives	Downstepping trend	Alternating rise and falls	Alternating rise and falls with a greater pitch range
Conditionals	Downstepping trend	Alternating rise and falls	Alternating rise and falls with a greater pitch range

In Kenyan English, speakers typically produce a downstepping contour in imperative, declarative, and conditional forms of advice. We can tentatively analyse this as a sequence of H* followed by H* or !H* accents as shown in Figure 1 (extracted from Excerpt 1) for a declarative form of advice in Kenyan English. Although in British English the global falling intonation in giving advice has been said to contain a degree of authority on the part of the speaker [14], it is unclear whether this is the case in Kenyan English.

Excerpt 1: Situation "c": A woman asked whether she should be bitter after her husband has married two other women.
MOD: = host
2nd CL_F = second caller in the show, female
...
MOD: Should this lady be bitter?
2nd CL_F: The previous caller is talking about sharing.
MOD: Imagine!
2nd CL_F: *Kwani ni chakula?*
        Is it food?
        ...
MOD: Yes.
2nd CL_F: That's why you…yeah…<u>you should love one person</u>.
MOD: Yes.
2nd CL_F: There's nothing as loving others at the same time. You can't be in two places at the same time. You see that's why wives, you know..they're dying of depression…so early. Me I can't stand that.
MOD: You can't stand that?
2nd CL_F: No! <u>It's better tell me niko na mwengine basi uniache</u>
        I have another one then let
        <u>mi niende, we divorce, I find another life.</u>
        me go
MOD: You don't want depression?
2nd CL_F: No! I don't want depression. I don't want to die early. I love myself so…
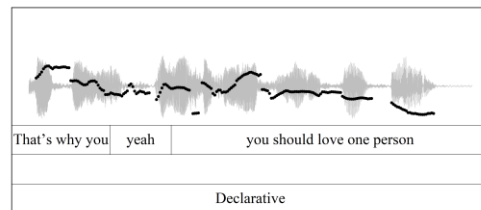

Figure 2: *An example of F0 contour when producing a declarative form of advice in Kenyan English.*

In this study, the imperative forms of advice included commands, instructions, warnings, and requests that invite action, while the declarative forms included suggestions as ways of giving advice. In our data, the F0 contours for imperatives and declaratives generally show a downstepping sequence of H* accents with L% in Kenyan English. This is contrary to, for instance, suggestions and warnings in British English having a rising tone that reportedly allows the advised person to take the final decision [14]. Similarly, there was no final rising intonation in advising in Kiswahili and occasions of code-switching. In Kiswahili, we observe that the F0 takes alternating rises and falls for imperative, declarative and conditional forms, followed by a final fall (L%), as illustrated in Figure 3 (extracted from Excerpt 2).

Excerpt 2: Situation "d": A woman asked whether, when going through a divorce, she should leave with the money she contributed to the marriage and still ask for child support.
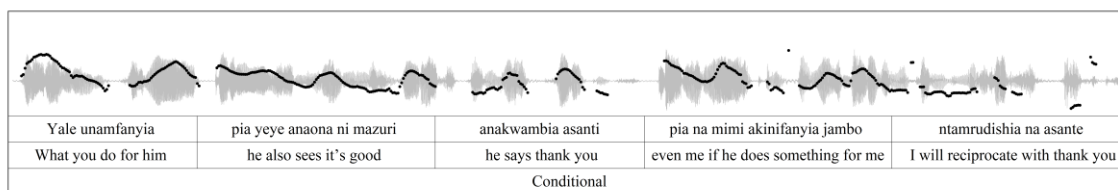MOD: = host; 4th CL_F = forth caller in the show, female

Yale unamfanyia	pia yeye anaona ni mazuri	anakwambia asanti	pia na mimi akinifanyia jambo	ntamrudishia na asante
What you do for him	he also sees it's good	he says thank you	even me if he does something for me	I will reciprocate with thank you
Conditional				

Figure 3: *An example of F0 contour when producing a conditional form of advice in Kiswahili.*

…
MOD: Does she have to say thank you when the man sends two thousand shillings to support his kid after he has been away for four years?
4th CL_F: ...yaani mbona mimi nataka nikimpikia chakula akila,
Why is it that I want when I cook for him and he eats,
na ni jukumu langu, aseme asante?
and it's my duty, him to say thank you?
…
MOD: ((laugh)) eee…
4th CL_F: Yale unamfanyia pia yeye anaona ni mazuri anakwambia
What you do for him he also sees it's good he says
asanti pia na mimi akinifanyia jambo
thank you even me if he does something for me
ntamrudishia na asante
I will reciprocate with thank you.
MOD: Okay.
4th CL_F: So, ni nipe nikupe.
So, it's give and take…

This intonational contour was generally applied to forms of advice such as warnings, suggestions, commands and requests equally (unlike British English [14]). We therefore tentatively conclude that in Kenyan English, Kenyan Kiswahili and instances of code-switching, the rising and falling intonation with L% in suggestions and warnings seem to impose the action rather than allow the advisee room to take the final decision. The use of this intonation in advising may, thus, be interpreted as a face-threatening act. Moreover, in instances of code-switching, which is an inexorable phenomenon for multilingual speakers, there is evidence of alternating rises and falls (as shown in Figure 4, extracted from Excerpt 1) with a larger pitch range in declaratives and conditionals as opposed to those in Kenyan English. A comparison between the two languages and instances of code-switching shows that there is a final fall, irrespective of the use of imperatives, declaratives and conditional forms of advice. Whereas English has downstepping contours, Kiswahili reveals alternating rises and falls. In code-switching, for example in the sequence of English-Kiswahili-English as shown in Figure 4, the phrase in English that immediately follows Kiswahili yields more rises and falls compared to the phrase before the switch. This could be associated with a carry over from Kiswahili, which has more dynamic intonation contours, reflecting the use of a shared intonational space rather than two distinct systems. Furthermore, informal observation suggests that utterances in Kiswahili are produced in an overall larger F0 range than those in English by the same speaker.

6. Conclusions

The linguistic range available to Kenyan multilinguals reveals a shared repertoire of intonational patterns for English and Kiswahili, but the distribution of the patterns is different for the different syntactic realisations of advice and for each language. Speakers make use of various pragmatic strategies and syntactic forms to accomplish the speech act of advising, especially the tendency to use Kiswahili or to code-switch between English and Kiswahili for elaboration whilst advising on taboo or difficult subjects in radio phone-ins. Importantly, the range of spoken codes, including the accompanying aural clues (like intonation), are part of translanguaging strategies that consider language contact more as a continuum. A preliminary analysis reveals that Kenyan speakers of English often make use of global falling contours (downstepping) in imperatives, declaratives, and conditional forms of advice in radio phone-ins showing more neutral and controlled emotional states or pragmatic meanings. In using suggestions and warnings as ways of advising, the global falling intonation in Kenyan English may be interpreted as allowing the advisee to take the final decision, even if the situation is emotion-provoking. In non-emotion-provoking contexts, like reading aloud and interview sessions on general topics, speakers of some ethnically-marked varieties of Kenyan English do apply a rising terminal to statements [5]. Even if rising-falling patterns are possible in both Kiswahili and English, in advising they are more common in Kiswahili, since this language tends to be used to express more varied meanings, urgency, and emotional content. Thus, in this context, advice-giving in Kiswahili sounds more lively, expressive and dynamic with more rises and falls. However, when giving a suggestion or a warning, we tentatively analyse it as imposing an action, which may subtly be interpreted as a face-threatening act. The shared intonational repertoire (rising-falling patterns) for both languages constitutes one aspect of shared space within which intonation contours are associated with a specific pragmatic meaning in given contexts [28], [29].

7. Acknowledgements

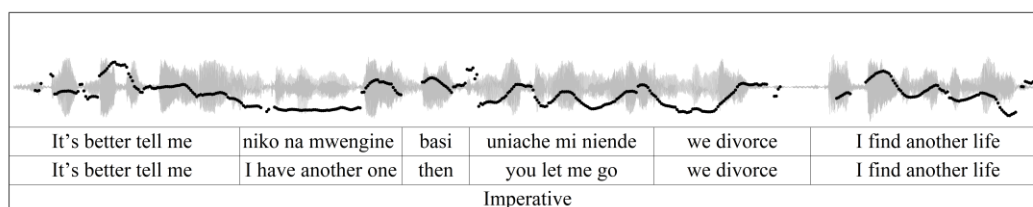| It's better tell me	niko na mwengine	basi	uniache mi niende	we divorce	I find another life
It's better tell me	I have another one	then	you let me go	we divorce	I find another life
Imperative					

Figure 4: *An example of F0 contour when code-switching (English-Kiswahili-English) in an imperative form of advice.*

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