ABSTRACT

Communication is the essence of human interaction. The nature of communication is dependent on interaction between two or more individuals. Construction sites in Gem sub-County, Kenya bring together a variety of people of diverse interests, lifestyles and specializations. Construction workers engage in communication processes which exhibit diversity, since they apparently have a specific language for the in-group which is explicitly understood by themselves to the exclusion of non-workers. The language variety is replete with unique linguistic features. This unique style of expression act as an effective communication among the workers. In view of this, group identity, linguistic intergroup bias and linguistic features are some of the aspects of the gaps that this study addresses in the context of construction workers. The aim of this study was therefore to investigate the linguistic features of in-group language among construction workers of Gem sub-County, Kenya. The specific objectives of the study were to: describe the characteristics of in-group language among construction workers in Gem sub-County, determine the possible causes of linguistic intergroup bias in construction sites, and evaluate the linguistic features that construction workers adopt in their speech. Accommodation theory by Giles (2005) and the theory of Politeness by Brown and Levinson (1987) guided this study. The study used Accommodation Theory’s three strategies of convergence, divergence and maintenance to describe, determine and evaluate the in-group language of construction workers. The study adopted descriptive research design. The study area was Gem sub-County, Kenya. The study population comprised 110 construction workers. The sample population included; 10 construction workers, 1 site and 87 utterances. The unit of analysis in this study was the utterance. The study adopted purposive sampling in selecting the appropriate samples. Data were collected through participant observation and interview methods. The research tools for data collection namely the observation and interview schedules were pre-tested in order to ensure validity and reliability. Data were then analyzed qualitatively into themes. The study revealed that construction workers use a particular sociolect when interacting with fellow workers in the construction site and this sociolect is a restricted code. The analysis also revealed that in-group language generated a variety of stylistic choices that were in turn used to understand the mode of communication in the site. This was an indication that stylistic choices determined language usage in construction sites. It was also noted that construction workers converge on the communicative patterns deemed to be characteristic of their interactions. Finally, it was evident in the discussion that construction workers’ use ordinary words but assign them special meaning with a view to maintaining positive in-group identity. The study recommends that construction workers should avoid the use of impolite remarks and taboo words for the sake of social harmony and smooth communication. This study would add sociolinguistic knowledge to the in-group language thereby benefitting linguists, sociologists, psychologists and the larger linguistic community.