

Language and the Development of Agriculture in Kenya

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Abstract

Agriculture is the backbone of Kenya's economy. Currently, it contributes 25%¹ of Kenya's GDP (Gross Domestic Product). Given its relevance, deliberate effort needs to be made to ensure that there is proper investment into this sector; and as this happens, attention should also be given to the issue of language. Currently, not much focus is given to language as an important element in the development of agriculture. This is a contradiction because language plays a central role through its communicative function, without which agricultural involvement cannot take place. This paper investigates the role of language in the development of agriculture in Kenya. The study is based on the premise that communication is key in the agricultural sector mainly because the language that is used to communicate and how the communication is done determine its success. This is an applied theoretical study that delves into the interface between linguistics and agriculture, hence, its interdisciplinary approach. The study was carried out in Uasin Gishu and Trans-nzoia counties in Rift Valley province, Kenya; where a total of 93 respondents were involved. Data was collected using questionnaires and analysis done through categorization and description. Findings show that in many instances, there is breakdown of communication that arises from the inability of the professionals to communicate the acquired knowledge in a language that is understood by the lay public. The study recommends an interdisciplinary approach in the training of graduates in the field of agriculture. This will enable them acquire skills that make them optimally prepared to serve as professionals in their area of specialization. If done, it will reduce inaccessibility to relevant information that has adverse consequences to the economic development of the nation.

Keywords: Agriculture, language, communication, development, Kenya

1. Introduction

This paper aims at investigating the communicative role that is played by language in the development of agriculture in Kenya. The study is based on the premise that language is very important in the development of agriculture; and that the type of language used and how it is employed determines the success of this sector as well as its ultimate contribution to the national economy.

So far, a lot of research has been done in the area of agricultural products and practices, natural and organic food production, food related risks, food safety, storage, food and health related issues. In Kenya for instance, KARI (Kenya Agricultural Research Institute), which is a national Institution of agriculture is charged with research and it has done a lot of research in food crops, livestock and range management, land and water management and socio-economics. Likewise, a lot of research has been done by KARI on technology generation that ensures food security, improved productivity and environmental conservation KARI <http://www.kari.org>. However, despite the numerous researches, not much has been done on the communicative aspect of language in agriculture. This is why this study has been carried out with the aim of establishing the communicative relevance of language and how this can be enhanced for the development of the sector. In this study, it is hypothesized that language (and how it is used) has a big role to play in the development of agriculture in a nation.

According to the recent facts and figures as presented in a report on Kenya's GDP that was released by KNBS (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2014), "agriculture is estimated to contribute the largest share of GDP of nearly 25%" (pp. 12). This is an indication that agriculture is a very important sector in the overall development of Kenya's economy. Likewise according to a report released by KARI (2012), 45% of the government revenue comes from agriculture. The sector also contributes 75 % of the industrial raw materials and more than 50 % of the export earnings. The agricultural sector is also the greatest employer in Kenya as it accounts for about 65% of the total employment. In rural areas, 80 % of the population derives their livelihood from agricultural related activities. This is how important the agricultural sector is in Kenya; it positively contributes to solving the many social and economic challenges that face the country. According to the same report it is indicated that, "Given the central role the agricultural sector plays in the economy, the Government is in the process of finalizing the development of the ASDS (Agricultural Sector Development Strategy). The overall aim of this strategy is to strategically make the agricultural sector a key driver for achieving the 10 per cent annual economic growth rate expected under the economic pillar of Kenya's Vision 2030. Through the ASDS, the government aims at transforming the agricultural sector into a profitable economic activity capable of

attracting private investment and providing gainful employment for the people” (KARI, 2012). Given the relevance of the agricultural sector and the highest percentage of Kenyans who work benefit, it is from it, it is important that all citizens are equipped with relevant knowledge, which ensures total participation for maximum production. This is especially important in rural areas, where most farmers are situated; they need relevant knowledge and skill.

It is true that Kenya as a nation has highly qualified professionals in the field of agriculture who are involved in research and who have the capacity to train graduates who in the long run can participate in the development of the agricultural sector. However, the reality is that these graduates can only be effective if they have the ability to communicate the acquired knowledge and skill. As it is currently, the majority of end users do not have access to relevant knowledge in the field of agriculture as they should. There seem to be a disconnect between the acquired knowledge and its implementation. This has negatively impacted on the development of the nation as knowledge remains inaccessible, hence useless. It is important that professionals in the field of agriculture not only have specialized knowledge in their field of expertise but also relevant communicative ability without which their knowledge becomes irrelevant. In other words, the human factor is important despite the increased and improved technology. This is the position taken by Griffin (2000: 55) who says that: “...meaning arises out of social interactions that people have with each other...meaning is not inherent in objects, it is not pre-existent in a state of nature...meaning is negotiated through the use of language”. Unless meaning is negotiated through an understood language, this meaning remains a mystery. This has become even more important in this technological era, where science and technology has taken centre-stage in all areas of human livelihood.

In the pre-industrial era, where for instance farming was done on a small scale just for consumption within the family unit, there was less demand with regard to technology. Indigenous knowledge was utilized to ensure that the environment was conserved and that there was enough food that was produced for the family. This was effectively done using indigenous languages that were used as media of knowledge transmission. However, currently, the situation is different and as such it calls for new and adoptive approaches. Climate change and global participatory demands require that new strategies be used by all those that are involved. For global participation, science and technology has to be embraced both for improved production as well as for global competition. This has proved to be a challenge to most developing nations like Kenya, mainly because of communication hiccup. For improved production and global participation, knowledge in science and technology has to be communicated effectively to all stakeholders. As Gamble (2005: 5) says; “possessing and developing the ability to communicate effectively with others is essential not only for your own success but also for the success of the organization you work for, any group you become a part of....” For professionals in the field of agriculture, this is important not just for their sake, but for the sake of all the other stakeholders (consumers) and the nation at large.

In Kenya, graduates in the field of agriculture receive their training mainly in English and since most of the knowledge that is received is foreign and in a foreign linguistic system, it requires that for them to be able to disseminate the same as professionals in their area of specialization, they must be well prepared during their training. This is quite important because for one to effectively communicate, the communicator must i) know their audience ii) know the subject matter and iii) use an appropriate medium that can be understood by the audience. The ultimate goal for this is to have a common understanding. However, as it has been, emphasis in training has been on content and not much on how this content should be disseminated.

Lack of preparedness with regard to communication of the acquired knowledge has made it difficult for most professionals in this field to carry out their duties competently. The most disadvantaged are the rural clients, most of whom are either illiterate or semi-illiterate and as such they have no direct access to knowledge and information that would help them achieve maximum production without reliance on the agricultural extension officers in the field. With advanced science and technology, it is expected that information on new agricultural technologies, droughts, pests and diseases, improved seedlings, fertilizers, credit and market prices etc. be communicated to stakeholders in a language that can be well understood. Miscommunication and/ or lack of relevant information has made it difficult for most farmers to adapt to new technologies that have been developed in this industrial era and instead traditional methods of farming and animal husbandry are still prevalent especially in rural areas. This has negatively affected production. Apart from poor production, lack of relevant information has also led to ecological damage as well as health hazards. Consequently, there is need to communicate the effects of what has come with post-industrial agriculture (both positive and negative) to the common man in a language that can be understood by all; and also communicate the strategies of how to deal with the negative effects. For instance, it is true that the use of modern fertilizers has led to improved production but at the same time it has had negative effects like land degradation, reduced water resources, health hazards on aquifers (water animals), global warming and climate change. The question is, how many are informed about such effects and how many are actively engaged? Even the issue of sustainable agriculture that can positively contribute to the development of the economy has not been fully embraced because of lack of information. The

reality is that not many professionals have the ‘linguistic capacity’ to communicate such information in a language that is understood by the lay persons. Lack of such information makes it impossible for stakeholders to device ways of either adapting to new technology or of dealing with such emerging challenges.

Given the foregoing, the current study proposes an interdisciplinary approach in the training of graduates. This will help bridge the gap between what professionals know and the implementation of the same (knowledge). It is hoped that the findings of this study will be of benefit to the agricultural sector in the sense that if adapted, institutions of higher learning will be able to produce graduates in the field not only equipped with scientific and technological knowledge on the subject matter but also with communicative ability. This is because the social element is just as important as the scientific and technological innovations in the agricultural sector; and the three interact for the ultimate success of the entire sector.

The relevance of this study cannot be underscored because for effective performance in any field, one not only requires knowledge in the subject area but more so, communicative ability that is required for the dissemination of the same. This is when knowledge becomes relevant.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study is based on two communication theories; that is, Interaction adaptation theory and Expectancy violation theory.

Interaction adaptation theory was first conceptualized by Burgoon et al (1995). This theory built on previous theoretical work on interpersonal adaptation and dyadic interaction processes, particularly expanding Burgoon’s Expectancy violation theory. The theory predicts *how*, *when*, and *why* people adapt to another’s verbal and non-verbal communication in similar or dissimilar ways.

Beebe, Beebe and Redmond (2005:190) define Interaction adaptation theory as, “a theory suggesting that people interact with others by adapting to what others are doing...Sometimes, we relate by mirroring the posture or behavior of others”. According to this theory, adaptation in interaction is responsive to the *needs*, *expectations* and *desires* of communicators and it affects how communicators position themselves in relation to one another and adapt to another’s communication (White and Burgoon 2001). The theory further indicates that individuals bring to interactions certain requirements that reflect basic human needs, expectations about behaviors based on social norms, and desires for interaction based on goals and personal preferences. These elements combine to form an assessment of the anticipated behavior in interaction called interaction position (IP). If we know the IP of someone we communicate with, then it becomes easier for us to communicate accordingly.

On the other hand, Ifante (2010) says that we alter our behavior in response to the behavior of another person in conversations. This is done by either reciprocating (matching) or compensating in order to keep the balance and success of interaction.

This theory has been used to explain what happens when professionals in the field of agriculture interact with their clients while discharging their mandate. The basic assumption is that professionals are required to adapt to the communicative needs of their clients in order for them to effectively disseminate the relevant information that they possess. They are expected to linguistically adjust to accommodate their clients. This however, rarely happens (of course not out of choice) mainly because the professionals receive their training in a foreign linguistic system that is full of scientific and technological terms, which they are unable to translate into the various linguistic systems that are conversant to their clients. This linguistic inability makes it impossible for the professionals to mirror the linguistic behavior of their interlocutors. Consequently, the needs of the two interactants (the professional and the client) are not met since on the one hand, the professional fails to satisfy the need to effectively disseminate what they know and on the other hand, the clients’ need of being informed also remains unsatisfied.

Apart from unsatisfied needs, the expectations of the two are never met. In this case, the professional expects that after disseminating information, the clients’ behavior and practice (with regard to farming) will be influenced positively. However, this also falls short because not much information is accessed by the clients, mainly because of failure of the two interactants to adjust to one another’s’ linguistic level. Likewise, the expectations of the clients of getting informed are not met. The same applies to the desires of the two interactants, which are not met because of non-adjustment to each other’s linguistic position.

The unmet needs, expectations and desires of the two interactants have had negative consequences on the success of interpersonal communication, which ultimately has had a bearing on the overall performance of the citizens in this very important sector.

For the Kenyan situation, it may be untrue to say that the professionals do not understand the interactional position of their clients; the truth is that they lack the linguistic capacity that is required for them to effectively interact with their clients in their respective interaction positions.

Just as with the interaction adaptation theory, the expectancy violation theory is a communication theory that was conceived by Burgoon (1978). According to this theory, an interaction can be described positively or negatively based on an individual’s expectations and actual behavior of a person. This theory tries

to explain the unexpected behaviors of human beings while interacting. The theory emphasizes an individual perception of the interaction in a particular situation. Basically, it is assumed that theory, while people communicate, they create an expectation of how the other will react. Violation of this expectation causes a perception that is negative or positive.

Expectancy in people is determined by:

- i) Interactants' characteristics.
- ii) Interpersonal characteristics.
- iii) The environment.

All the above characteristics lead to an expectation in behavior and the listener can conceive the violation in the expected behavior as positive or negative.

This theory applies to studies of various interpersonal relationships. In the current study, the theory has been used to show how violation in the expectancy of interactants (in this case the professionals and their clients) occur. While the clients expect the professionals to effectively communicate information in their field of expertise, the professionals fail to do so because of lack of capacity in the 'right linguistic code' that is understood by their clients. On the other hand, the professionals expect their recipients to grasp the information but somehow, this does not happen because of their linguistic deficiency in the code that is used by the professionals. Consequently, there is violation of expectation on both sides as there is a mismatch between the expected behavior and the real manifestation. This violation of expectation in behavior is triggered by the interactants characteristics, their interpersonal characteristics and the environment; where, we have the 'knows' and those that 'do not know'. The dichotomy arising from the way the two groups have been cultured, with one having gone through a formal training in their field of specialization, where English is the language of instruction; while the other not having gone through the same training and/ or exposed to a similar foreign media of instruction. This being the case (that the professionals are unable to explicitly explain to their interlocutors what they know in a language that can be understood), the listener more often conceives violation in the expected behavior on the part of the professionals. This violation is in terms of linguistic behavior. The violation is perceived negatively by the listener and as a result, the outcome is unfavorable. In the context of this study, the outcome has often been the non-performance of the masses in the agricultural sector because of unfulfilled expectations (of receiving relevant knowledge in the field that is required by every player).

The two communication theories that have been applied in the current study show how lack of adaptability, the existence of unmet needs, expectations and desires of interactants in the agricultural sector has negatively impacted on the Kenyan economy.

This study suggests that for effective performance, there is need for professionals to be trained in the required communicative needs so that they effectively function in the various interaction positions of their clients.

3. Methodology

This study adapted a descriptive design and it was carried out in Uasin Gishu and Trans-Nzoia Counties in Rift Valley province, Kenya. The sample consisted of 93 respondents who were purposively sampled from five different categories as they seemed relevant as per the study objectives. These were: 20 owners of/ and workers in agro-vet shops (these are shops that sell agricultural and veterinary products), 20 agricultural extension officers (those that directly work in the field with the farmers), 28 farmers, 5 lecturers who teach Agriculture as a degree program in the university and 20 students pursuing a degree program in Agriculture. Four different questionnaires were used to elicit data. The four types of questionnaires were based on the characteristics of the sample, with the first and second group (owners and/ or workers in agro-vet shops and agricultural extension officers) being given a similar questionnaire because they all deal with clients who seek for information.

Data analysis was descriptive in nature. Accordingly, the data were categorized and described based on the problem under investigation.

4. Findings and Discussion

All the 28 farmers who formed part of the sample participated in the study. Out of this group, a majority; that is, 26 spoke English, Kiswahili and a mother tongue, while 2 of them spoke Swahili and a mother tongue. None of the respondents was a monolingual. Likewise, most of the farmers (20 of them) who participated in the study claimed to be involved in mixed farming, where they grow cash crops like maize, sugarcane, beans, groundnuts, potatoes, cassava; poultry keeping, fish farming, dairy farming, and horticulture. Of the remaining, 4 were purely poultry farmers and finally, the other 4 said to be purely involved in dairy farming. However, what seemed true to all the participants is that they were all small scale farmers.

With regard to issues of communication in their daily farming activities, very few of them claimed to have no communication problem. The majority said they faced various communication handicaps as they engaged in their daily farming activities. So far, out of the 28 participants in the study, only 8 of them seemed comfortable engaging in agricultural discourses. However, the remaining 20 respondents had communication

problems that arose from the way professionals behaved linguistically, while discharging their mandate. The use of scientific and technical terms that are so specific to the field of agriculture was an uphill for laymen to comprehend. Such botanical terms are in foreign languages mainly in English...that is understood by very few. Even those that reported to be competent in English faced a challenge in comprehending scientific and technical terms that are specific to agricultural discourses. Consequently, for the majority, their expectations are more often never met. The fact that this group misses out on the relevant information that is central to active and optimum participation in the agricultural sector has greatly impacted on the overall performance of the sector. This is based on the fact that farmers (who in Kenya form the highest percentage) are ill-equipped with regard to the relevant information that they need.

With regard to difficulties in communication, it was noted that when faced with such communication challenges, most of them sought for clarification through a simplified language, while others sought for clarification but in their own mother tongue. Given that Kenya is a multilingual nation with diverse ethnic groups, this poses a problem because not all professionals share the same mother tongue with the clients. Apart from seeking for clarification, others noted that they sought for interpretation or translation into a language that is understood by the clients; such adaptation positively contributes to the reduction in communication barrier that hinders the reception of information. For technical terms that clients found difficult to pronounce, they requested to be shown the products before purchasing. This has had negative repercussions as more often clients end up purchasing what is not appropriate as they cannot remember the exact appearance of the product that they require. This, negatively impacts on production.

Basically, because of the various communication challenges, it was observed that many citizens who are involved in agricultural production lack access to the right information. Thus, their needs, expectations and desires are rarely satisfied by their interlocutors, while engaging in agriculture-based discourses.

Just as with their interlocutors, most of the professionals in the field of agriculture reported to be competent in at least three languages; namely, English, Kiswahili and a mother tongue. Out of the 40 Agro-Vet owners, attendants and agricultural extension officers) who participated in the study, 37 of them knew at least three languages; English, Kiswahili and a mother tongue, while 3 were competent in two languages; Kiswahili and a mother tongue. This formed 92.5 % and 7.5 % respectively. However, with regard to the type of media used by professionals in the agricultural field, Kiswahili, Kenya's national and official language was reported to be the main medium of communication. Out of the 40 participants, 33 of them (accounting for 82.5%) used Kiswahili for communication with the farmers. The linguistic trend observed here is based on the fact that Kiswahili has a wider coverage that cuts across the literate and the illiterate. Likewise, the fact that Kenya is a multilingual society makes it more appropriate for the professionals to use Kiswahili in communicating with their clients. For the few (3 professionals; accounting for 7.5%) who purely used mother tongue to communicate with their clients, it was because of the linguistic environment in which they operated, which caused them to converge. Finally, for the remaining 4 (accounting for 10%) who used both English and Kiswahili to communicate, they switched between the two codes depending on those they interacted with.

Despite the fact that most professionals are competent in English, Kiswahili and a mother tongue as indicated above, they still face linguistic challenges while disseminating information to their clients. These challenges arise because of the fact that in their training, the medium of communication is English, while in their daily operations; they are forced to use a different linguistic system that suits their interlocutors. Consequently, translating information into an understood language possesses a challenge to them. Out of the 40 professionals who participated in the study, only 7 (making up 17.5%) reported not to have communication challenges but the remaining 33 (this is 82.5%) agreed to the fact they faced communication challenges while transmitting information in their area of specialization to clients.

The other type of sample that participated in the study comprised of 5 lecturers who teach Agriculture at university level. Data from this sample is very informative since these instructors are the ones who are charged with the responsibility of producing graduates for the market. Asked about what they thought with regard to the issue of language, communication and the field of agriculture, they all admitted that language and communication is central in their area of specialization without which no information can be disseminated. They all reported to have competence and skill in their area of specialization but also reiterated that this only applies as far as communicating knowledge through the media in which they received the training but not in any other linguistic system. The fact they received foreign knowledge in a foreign linguistic system limits them to disseminating the same in a foreign language, which is replicated in the field when the graduates start practicing. The graduates graduate from the university fully equipped with knowledge which they cannot effectively disseminate to their targeted audiences. This is observed from the data that was elicited from the 20 students who were pursuing Agriculture as a Degree program.

Out of the 20 students who participated in the study, a majority; that is, 18 (accounting for 90%) acknowledged that while in class, they were able to grasp the technological and scientific concepts (used in agriculture) right; that is, they understood well. Only 2 students (10%) reported to have difficulties

comprehending the specialized jargon. Despite the fact that a majority of the students reported to have no comprehension problem, they all admitted to the fact that they are not able to effectively disseminate the same knowledge in a language other than English, the language of instruction.

The above is evidence to the fact that the main source of communication challenges as they exist in agriculture-based discourses are enshrined on the type of curricula that are used in institutions of higher learning. Focus in these curricula is to produce professionals in their area of specialization, and not much on ensuring that the acquired knowledge is effectively disseminated and consumed. This is what later on translates into unfulfilled needs, expectations and desires on the part of the targeted recipients of the acquired knowledge. In the long run, this translates into poor participation and performance in the agricultural sector.

One of the reasons cited by all the respondents as causing communication breakdown was the high rate of illiteracy of the indented recipients of the information. The fact that most of the clients are not 'literate' especially in 'English' means that the professionals are expected first to translate the information into a language that is understood by their interlocutors for effective communication to occur. This requirement poses a challenge because even professionals lack the linguistic capacity to translate most of the scientific jargon that is specific to their field of expertise, especially having trained using a foreign language. What makes the situation even worst is the fact that most of the scientific terms used in this field have no equivalents in either Kiswahili or the various mother tongues. In an attempt to fulfill the clients' expectations, professionals resort to giving explanations which sometimes do not bring out the original indented meaning. This communication hiccup has had negative consequences to the agricultural sector as incomplete or incorrect information is transmitted to the public. Consumption of incomplete or incorrect information triggers wrong and uninformed actions that negatively impacts on the overall production in the sector.

Apart from illiteracy, communication barrier is also caused by Kenya's diverse ethnic groups, which acts as a hindrance to the communication of information to clients. Given that Kenya a multilingual nation, it is not possible to come across a professional who is able to adjust to all the linguistic demands of the various interaction positions of the clients. As indicated above, the option is to resort to the use of Kiswahili which seems neutral and understood by many. Though a better option, the fact that Kenyan professionals have not been trained using Kiswahili means that they have to translate what they know into Kiswahili before communication the same. This is a challenge for them because they lack the required capacity. This being the case, professionals end up misrepresenting information or not communicating at all. Failure by the professionals to meet the interlocutors' needs, expectations and desires has had negative repercussions to the agricultural sector because misrepresented or withheld information, triggers wrong action or no action at all.

Likewise, the fact that the professionals in the field of agriculture are required to communicate to different categories of clients at the same time poses a challenge. In group communication, there are various categories of clients ranging from the literate to the illiterate, the fast and slow learners, the young and the old, those that are informed and those that are not informed at all. Adjusting linguistically to accommodate all these categories of people is a challenge to the professionals who are expected to effectively disseminate relevant information. Consequently, while a few may benefit from the information, the majority end up not benefiting at all. This has negative implications on their participation and overall performance in the agricultural production. However, the story would have been different had the language of training been synonymous with that of the consumers of the information. This explains how important communication is to the agricultural sector.

To deal with the various communication challenges in the agricultural sector, professionals have come up with several devices; including: simplifying the meaning of uninterruptable technical and scientific terms by using detailed explanations, using interpreters who are competent in at least two languages; that is, either English and Kiswahili or English and a mother tongue. Resorting to the use of mother tongue in cases where the professionals share their linguistic code with their clients, the use of Visual Aids, emphasis on concrete rather than abstract illustrations, emphasis on practical demonstrations rather than mere explanations; these are some of the devices that are employed to reduce the communication barrier in as much as the problem still exists.

Despite the effort made by professionals to ease communication with their clients in their area of operation, it is evident that the linguistic aspect has negatively affected the citizens' participation in agricultural production in Kenya. As it is, many participants in agriculture, who are mainly illiterate or semi-illiterate (literacy in the sense of having received an education in English) rural dwellers, have found themselves not able to fully engage in agricultural production because of inaccessibility of the right information. Though professionals are well equipped with the required knowledge, they are not well prepared to communicate the same to their recipients who need it for optimum participation. This has in a way has negatively impacted on the overall economic development of the nation that largely depends on agriculture as a source of development.

From the findings, it was established that because of the many communication challenges, many professionals would prefer to be equipped with relevant knowledge in their area of specialization as well as relevant linguistic skills during their training so that they effectively disseminate the knowledge which they possess. For instance alongside the specialized knowledge that is taught to graduates, the curricula should

include programs on ‘language for specific purposes’ (specifically, ‘language for Agriculture’ or ‘Agricultural language’), where specific jargon that is used in this field is analyzed in detail besides being taught on ‘how to communicate agricultural knowledge’. Training in tailored communication skills would prepare them well in their profession. Likewise, training graduates in Business communication as well as entrepreneurial communication skills can help prepare Agricultural graduates better for effective delivery. Besides being taught language for specific purposes, training in translation and interpretation skills would greatly assist practicing agricultural professionals. Confronted with situations where clients lack competence in the working language of the professionals, such skill would be used to ensure that despite the linguistic barrier, transmission of relevant information takes place. This call for an interdisciplinary approach to the development and implementation of curricula in higher institutions of learning; where, the gap between what professionals know and the implementation is bridged through the inclusion of language and communication modules.

Apart from taking an interdisciplinary approach to curricula development and implementation, dissemination of knowledge to graduates in a language that is understood by the Kenyan majority would go a long way to reduce the communication challenges that are experienced in the field. To most professionals, having the same knowledge in Kiswahili would make it easier for them to communicate and thereby, adapt to their clients’ interaction position. This would as well benefit clients who are illiterate because most of the illiterate population in Kenya has some competence in Kiswahili (Kenya’s national as well as official language); enough to access relevant information in the language. This is a better option that is not as expensive as compared to that of training graduates in their mother tongue, which is not possible given Kenya’s diverse linguistic situation. Finally, to a few respondents, deploying professionals in areas where their vernacular is spoken was seen as the preferred solution to the existing communication barrier. Though this suggestion sounds as though it is a better option, it is not tenable. Going for this option would fragment the nation to the extent that the presumed positive impact on the agricultural sector would not be realized. However, whatever the case, something needs to be urgently done in the agricultural sector in order to alleviate the existing communication challenges, whose negative implications are apparent.

5. Conclusion

This study sought to explore the role of language in communicating information in agriculture-based discourses. From the findings, it has been shown that language is central in communicating relevant information that is required for the development of the agricultural sector, though as it is, there seem to be a mismatch between the acquired knowledge on the one hand and its implementation on the other. It has also been shown that lack of linguistic capacity by the interactants in the agricultural sector in Kenya has contributed to the existence of unmet needs, expectation and desires, which in the long run have negatively affected this sector. The fact that those who are charged with the responsibility of disseminating relevant information fail to do so because of insufficient capacity means that relevant information that is meant for consumers remains largely inaccessible. This study calls for an interdisciplinary approach in the instruction and training of the graduates who have the ultimate mandate of disseminating agricultural information. There is need for the revision of the curricula for Agriculture in higher institutions of learning in Kenya in order to incorporate language and communication-based programs that are particularly tailored for graduates of Agriculture. Such curricular should not only focus on the specialized knowledge in the field of agriculture but more so, on the communicative aspect of language. If and when done, interactants will be in a position to comply with the requirements of the interaction adaptation theory as they reduce on the violation of the interactants’ needs, expectations and desires.

Recommendation

- 1) Based on the findings, it is recommended in this paper that either the government or academic institutions of higher learning take an initiative to train professionals in the field of agriculture about the relevance of effective learning communication of information. To do so, relevant communication courses that are tailored specifically for this group of professionals need to be developed and fully implemented. Such programs should take into account the technical and scientific jargon that is foreign to the lay public.
- 2) It is important to rethink and perceive the agricultural sector differently, not just as a sector that involves farmers but as an important sector that has far reaching consequences to the nation in terms of its socio-economic development. This can only happen if the research that is done by scholars in the field of agriculture becomes valuable by being consumed by the relevant stakeholders; including small scale farmers.

Notes

1. The percentage is based on the recently Revised National Accounts Statistics (September, 2014), which shows an increased GDP per capita for 2013 being US \$1,269 as compared to the previous estimates of

US \$994 for the same year. This means that Kenya is now categorized as a middle income country as its GDP per capita is well above the World Bank's Benchmark of US \$ 1,036.(KNBS 2014: 12).

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