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## Intertextuality in Sheng Spoken Word Poetry

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Bora Mwadeje Mbito<sup>1\*</sup> , Gatitu Kiguru<sup>2</sup>, Hilda Kebeya<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2&3</sup>*Department of Literature, Linguistics and Foreign Languages, Kenyatta University, Kenya,*  
[borambito@gmail.com](mailto:borambito@gmail.com)<sup>1\*</sup>, [borambito@gmail.com](mailto:borambito@gmail.com)<sup>2</sup> [kiguru.gatitu@ku.ac.ke](mailto:kiguru.gatitu@ku.ac.ke)<sup>3</sup>

\*Corresponding author

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**Abstract:** This article examines techniques of intertextuality in Sheng spoken word poetry in Kenya. Intertextuality is the connectedness of existing texts in a new text. Sheng is a non-standard language spoken in Kenya. Kristeva's ideas of intertextuality are instrumental in this study. Bazerman & Prior's model of intertextuality is used as an analytical tool in this study. The model has six intertextual techniques which include direct quotation, indirect quotation, mentioning a person, document, or statement, comment or evaluation on a statement, text, or otherwise invoked voice, using recognisable phrasing, and terminology associated with specific people or groups of people or particular documents and using language and forms that seem to echo certain ways of communicating, discussions among other people, and types of documents. The data of the study were sourced from Sheng spoken word poems. Ten Sheng spoken word poems were sampled from five poets. The sampling was done purposely based on the richness of the poem's intertextuality. Through the content analysis schedule, words and phrases exhibiting intertextuality were identified and categorised into suitable intertextual techniques for description. The findings revealed that Sheng spoken word artists incorporate existing texts from discourses of religion, politics, relationships, and entertainment to voice real societal issues.

**Keywords:** Intertextuality, Sheng, Spoken word

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### 1. Introduction

Sheng is a non-standard language that is characterised by code-switching (Kanana & Kebeya, 2018). This is brought about by language contact, especially in the urban cosmopolitan environment. It is often used by the urban dwellers, especially the youths, to confide their secrets. However, its usage has made trajectories beyond secrecy and urban settings (Samper, 2002). Speakers of Sheng normally switch from Kiswahili to English and local languages. As a language, people utilize in various spheres such as business, music, and entertainment. Due to its extensive usage, Sheng spoken word artists normally utilize it in the creation of poems. In the process, they tend to weave existing texts into their poems. The weaving occurs through various techniques of intertextuality, and they are creatively done such that understanding them requires unearthing the contextual usage of the words. The Sheng spoken word poetry is the dependent variable of the study since it depends on intertextuality in its formation.

### 2. Literature review

#### 2.1. Kristeva's Approach to Intertextuality

Kristeva introduced Bakhtin's work to a French audience in the late 1960s. Bakhtin's English translations were published in the 1980s, along with Kristeva's writings (Hodges, 2015). Kristeva is acknowledged for bringing the word intertextuality to the world of print media, particularly in her 1967 article "Bakhtine, le mot, le dialogue, et le roman." At this time, there were no English translations until the 1980s, when she did most of her translations. Consequently, intertextuality became prevalent. The term Intertextuality is associated with Kristeva's work 'Desire in Language' when she coined the term intertextuality to describe the Bakhtinian idea that any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another (Kristeva, 1980). Kristeva (1980) distinguished between two axes in text analysis: the horizontal axis (subject-addressee) and the vertical axis (text-context). The relationships that exist both inside and outside of the text are the focus of the vertical axis. On the other hand, the dialogical relationship between the writer and the reader is depicted on the horizontal axis.

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Bakhtin (2010) discusses these axes as "dialogue and ambivalence," but he doesn't clearly distinguish them. In her work "Word Dialogue and the Novel," Kristeva proposes that writing texts involves dialogue with earlier texts (Kristeva, 1986). This elaborates the structure of Sheng spoken word (woven with existing texts), and it also cements the need to understand existing texts before understanding the present one. In the context of this study, the audience are expected to understand existing texts to make a correct contextual interpretation of the Sheng spoken word poetry since the poem converses with existing texts. Nevertheless, her ideas are judged as being too broad to be applied to identify overt instances of intertextuality (Mason, 2019). His approach begs the question of which specific texts engage in dialogue in the current text.

Despite the criticism, Kristeva's exploration of intertextuality as a process of textual dialogue and engagement with earlier texts laid the foundation for contemporary understandings of intertextuality as a dynamic and multifaceted phenomenon (Kristeva, 1986). This version of intertextuality is appropriate for the study since the Sheng Spoken Word poems tend to dialogue with existing texts.

## 2.2. Bazerman's Theoretical Model of Intertextuality

Bazerman (2003) and Bazerman and Prior (2004) presented a model of intertextuality with intertextual techniques. The study has used this model of intertextuality to describe techniques of intertextuality in the Sheng spoken word poetry. This model of intertextuality is appropriate because it is detailed, clear, and comprehensive. It has an organised collection of techniques of intertextuality that makes it easier for analysis.

The first technique is direct quotation. This technique is often marked by quotation marks, block indentation, italics, or another typographic setting apart from the other words of the text. In spoken discourse like the Sheng spoken word poetry, the Performer may take words verbatim from other genres to conform to their desired contextual usage in their poem, resulting in direct quotations from the original author's words.

Indirect quotation. This technique involves reporting the words of the original author. The text creatively sculpts meaning from previous text, utilizing various lexical items through paraphrasing while maintaining the original author's semantic status, enhancing comprehension for recipients. Notably, there is a filtering of meaning by the second author to suit their purpose. A spoken word artist can take a paraphrase of a bible verse or part of an existing song to achieve their purpose in the poem.

Mentioning of a person, document, or statement. In this technique, a text producer may mention another person or document, or statements from other sources. Text consumers rely on previous sources for understanding, while the second author incorporates source traces without semantic specifications and acknowledgement. These sources include politics, music, and names of places.

A performer may comment or evaluate a statement, text, or otherwise invoked voice. This is the fourth technique of intertextuality. Here, the creator of a present text (poet/artist) passes judgment on a certain statement or text. In this technique, Sheng spoken word artists are able to creatively evaluate political discourses and comment on various concepts as detailed in the data.

The fifth intertextual technique is the use of recognisable phrasing and terminology associated with specific people or groups of people or particular documents. The Sheng spoken word artists normally use trending words or phrases that are easily recognisable. They tend to borrow these words from other Sheng content creators, television advertisements, and even common political utterances. These words are overly used in digital platforms such as Facebook. TikTok and WhatsApp are hence very common and easy to recognise.

Lastly, using language and forms that seem to echo certain ways of communicating, discussions among other people, and types of documents. Genre, kinds of vocabulary (or register), stock phrases, and patterns of expression may be of this sort. For instance, a performer can appear on stage and begin "Fellow Kenyans..." Other than attracting the attention of the audience, such an introductory phrase could hint that the performer is going to situate himself in Kenya's political discourse.

Generally, all texts echo traces of existing texts. Van Zoonen (2017) posits that Intertextuality refers to the relationship between all texts, including written, spoken, formal, artistic, and mundane. Deng, Laghari, & Gao (2021) notes that pure genres are becoming increasingly hard to find in the actual discursive world because text creators frequently incorporate different genres in discourse production to attain social and private goals. As noted earlier, a text is anything that reveals meaning; text creators rely on these texts in various forms to create new ones with new semantic intentions. In the same breadth, anything that the Sheng spoken word artists mention, provided it has meaning and can be analytically contextualized and conclusions drawn, it qualifies to be a text.

**Table 1:** Prevalence of techniques of intertextuality in the Sheng spoken word poems.

Techniques	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	TOTAL
Frequency	17	35	65	11	9	28	165
percentage	10.3	21.2	39	7	5.4	17	100

## 3. Research methodology

The data presented in this article is part of a larger Masters Study where 5 Sheng spoken word poets were sampled and from each, 2 poems were sampled. The study employed purposive sampling method to sample 10 Sheng spoken word poems based on their richness in intertextuality. After this, through content analysis schedule, words and phrases that had evidence of intertextuality were identified and then classified into appropriate intertextual techniques for description.

#### 4. Findings and discussions

The next sections present the findings of the study. The discussion is supported by sampled excerpts from the data. Data that is in Sheng is italicized, followed by an English translation in brackets.

##### 4.1. Techniques of Intertextuality in the Sheng Spoken Word Poems

T1. Direct quotation.

T2. Indirect quotation.

T3. Mentioning a person or document or statement.

T4. Comment or evaluate a statement or text or otherwise invoked voice.

T5. Recognisable phrasing & terminologies associated with a particular group of people or a document.

T6. Using language that seems to echo certain ways of communication, discussion among other people, and types of genres.

The study identified 165 instances of intertextuality and recorded their prevalence according to the techniques of intertextuality as shown in Table 1 above.

##### 4.1.1. Mentioning a Person or Document

This was the most prevalent technique in the sampled Sheng spoken word poems. It had a prevalence of 39%. Poets mentioned celebrities such as musicians, comedians, socialites, footballers, songs, documents, and names of places, as exemplified below:

###### Example 1: *Ledama Ole Kina*

Sheng spoken word poets creatively capitalise on this technique. In example 1 above, Willie Oeba criticises the greed in the Kenyan government, especially senators, in his poem 'Dear Citizen.' He uses the name *Ledama Ole Kina*, a Kenyan senator for Narok County. The poet criticised the country's bad laws that subject people to over taxation, but there is no tangible progress, and instead, the leaders, like senators, are the ones who enjoy the tax collected. The senatorial position in Kenya is one that is almost vague, and Kenyans have been lamenting about these senators who earn salaries from Kenyan taxpayers, but their role is almost trivial compared to County Governors. The poet purposely chose *Ole Kina* over the rest of the senators to create a semantic impact and humour. The word *kina* in Swahili means depth. That's why the poet has used the word/name to describe the depth of the senator's pockets and, probably, by extension, their greed. So, his choice on *Kina* was to amplify the extent of greed of the political class. In this case, *Kina* is not just a name but a text carrying a contextual meaning. This converges with Fairclough (2003), who states that a text encompasses any significant written or spoken text that may be subjected to discourse analysis. This requires an avid follower of Kenya's politics to easily comprehend this discourse.

Apart from political discourse, Sheng spoken word artists employ religious discourses in their work as evidenced through the mention of Biblical characters. The names they use are quite popular, as shown in the example below:

###### Example 2: *Aliniruka kipetero kiyesu* (Trans: He denied me in a Peter-Jesus way)

The above example was extracted from Malika the Poet in her poem *Mapenzi Sumu* (Trans: Love is a poison). The poets employ a lot of biblical allusions to popularize their work. They did this through the creative infusion of biblical characters to achieve their purpose. In the example above, the poet referenced the biblical incident where Peter denied Jesus (Mark 14 66-72). The poet expressed that the person she had loved and had promised to stick by her, finally betrayed her. Notably, they tend to use very popular characters, probably to minimise semantic distance among a non-Christian audience. This shows that the poets employed a high level of critical thinking in their texts. As Bazerman (2003) notes, text authors need to apply critical thinking in order for their work to be relevant.

###### Example 3: *Adi Kamene, atakushow vijana wana go raw* (Trans: Ask Kamene; she would tell you youths are going raw).

The above example was an extract from Thony Voks' poem 'Conversation'. Whose creative mentioned the name Kamene Goro (Kenyan radio presenter). The poet has taken the last syllable of the name *Goro* to mean 'raw.' Here, he creatively commented on the prevalence of unprotected sex among the youths, hence raw. Apparently, the poets clearly fetch texts from various unrelated contexts for their poems, and understanding the entire poem substantially requires understanding how the texts are woven, as De Beaugrade and Dressler (1981) noted that the production and consumption of texts rely on ongoing comprehension in intertextuality.

###### Example 4: *Kuwait* (to wait), *sishanghai* (Trans: not surprised)

In the above example, Teardrops mentioned places like *Kuwait* and *Shanghai* in his poem 'Nataka Dame' (Trans: I want a girl). The word *kuwait* extracted from the statement, *Atakuwa willing Kuwait* (She will be willing to wait). In Kiswahili, *ku* is an infinitive that is attached to a basic verb, so *Kuwait* means to wait. In this context, a poet needs a girl who would be willing to wait for him. He does so to amplify the need for young girls to be patient. This is a pertinent social issue, especially with the surging cases of young girls mingling with very old men for money. Also, he mentioned *Shanghai* in his statement, *Nataka dame mwenye akikwambia my smile is real za hao wengine nikama city*

*flani ya China maze mi sishanghai* (I need a girl who, when she tells you my smile is real and the rest are like a certain city in China, I am not surprised). The name of the city sounds like a Kiswahili word, *shangaa* (wonder). He attached a Kiswahili negative prefix, *si*, before the city of Shanghai to create the intended meaning 'not surprised.' Notably, their creativity enables them to create new words from existing ones and contextually use them to achieve their purpose. As Bakhtin (1986) notes, everything that is said has previously been said by someone else, and individuals constantly absorb previous work and reuse it in the discourse of the present. Consumers of Sheng spoken word poems, therefore, need to be keen to unearth these intertextual references.

Clearly, poets often capitalise on existing names of places, celebrities, politicians, and biblical characters. If one is not keen enough to notice these, they cannot correctly interpret the genre. This agrees with Allen (2021) that creating meaning requires recognising textual connections and engaging with a variety of texts.

#### **4.1.2. Indirect Quotation**

Sheng spoken word artists indirectly quote texts from various contexts. This was the second most prevalent technique, with 21.2%. According to Bazerman & Prior (2004), this technique involves filtering the meaning of the original document by the second author to achieve their purpose. The poets indirectly quoted Bible scriptures, politicians, names of musicians, songs, and comedians. A high level of creativity was so evident in the application of this technique, and the consumer should be very alert to understand what the poet intended to pass across because the quote is not direct, as shown below.

**Example 1:** *alibadilisha maji into mnazi* (Trans: He changed water into palm wine)

The above example is extracted from Teardrops' poem 'Story Come.' Indirectly, he quotes Jesus' first miracle (changing water into wine), referencing the Bible (John 2:1-11). By comparing wine to locally available alcohol, he is trying to reduce the semantic distance for his audience to easily relate and understand. His purpose was to amplify that Jesus is very powerful and is capable of performing miracles. In Kenya, pastors have been incorporating Sheng in their sermons. For instance, Pastor T Mwangi has been famous for his Sheng gospel sermons. While preaching, he tends to code-switch, and this is common, especially in urban areas where the congregants are multilingual. This aligns with Kanana & Kebeya (2018) that Sheng is frequented by code-switching, especially in environments with many languages.

**Example 2:** *Alikua figure eight; I guess that's why akanipiga mateke* (Trans: She was figure eight; I guess that's why she kicked me).

In the example above, the poet, Thony Voks, indirectly quotes the Kenyan singer, Size Eight, along with her song, Mateke (Kicks). The phrase is drawn from the poem 'Premium Tears.' He seems to focus on musicians with their songs, proverbs, wise sayings, semantic expansion, and lexical manipulation. He indirectly quotes the Kenyan singer, Size Eight, along with her song, Mateke (Kicks). The singer implied that Jesus had kicked Satan, but the poet has filtered this and employed it in his situation where his lover betrayed him. Here, Tannen's (2015) idea that a text can be decontextualised and recontextualised becomes very practical.

**Example 3:** *Si usingizi tu pia kuna sites za pono* (Not just sleep, but there are sites of pono).

Here, Thony Voks indirectly quoted the English word 'porno' in his poem 'Conversation.' The Swahili word *pono*, which means deep sleep, has been used beyond its semantic status. The poet has taken advantage of its pronunciation and contextually implied an English word with almost similar pronunciation, 'porno.' There is a lot of lexical manipulation, and critical thinking is required to realise these intertexts. This agrees with Khalil's (2015) study on intertextuality in News Articles, whose conclusion was that intertextuality is used to force readers to think critically and make connections with previously learnt material.

**Example 4:** *Atakuona kama housing fund contributor* (Trans: He'll see you like a housing fund contributor).

The above extract is extracted from Willie Oeba's poem 'Dear Citizen.' The poet has indirectly quoted the Kenyan taxpayers. Kenyans have been subjected to paying taxes for houses built by the Kenyan government. The current regime that began in 2022 initiated this project that has cost Kenyans. The tax was termed as illegal by the Kenyan courts but the deductions are still evident in Kenyan's payslips. The poet here castigates dictatorial regimes that cordially talk to citizens while seeking votes, but eventually see them as housing fund contributors once the politicians resume the mantle of leadership.

Clearly, Sheng spoken word poets filter the meanings of existing texts and use them in different contexts. However, this begs the consumer of the text to be keen to understand the poets' intentions as they creatively weave these texts at various techniques of intertextuality.

#### **4.1.3. Using Language that seems to Echo Certain Ways of Communication, Discussion among other People and Types of Genres**

The study found instances where poets used a language that seems to echo certain ways of communication, discussion among other people, and types of genres. This technique emerged third in the study with a prevalence of 17%. Poets used words/phrases that echoed certain ways of speaking in various fields/groups, such as the transport sector, medical sector, religion, technology, and politics. The poets employed creativity in weaving all these texts, and their intentions could only be understood in context.

**Example 1:** *Wakadhani word imefika menopause* (Trans: They thought the word had reached menopause).

Teardrops used this phrase in his poem 'Story Come.' Menopause echoes the medical field, but the poet has contextually used it to imply the end. It is worth noting that the poet has employed a high level of creativity by employing semantic extension. Medically, menopause is associated with the age at which women no longer conceive. He borrowed this in his poem to explicate that the Jews killed Jesus and thought that the word of God had reached the end.

**Example 2:** *campaign: wezi wali turn into saints* (Trans: during the campaign, thieves turned into saints).

The example echoes politics. Willie Oeba criticised Kenya's political class in his poem 'Dear Citizen.' Kenyan politicians normally frequent churches during the campaign period to market their manifestos and even give enormous amounts of money to fund church projects. Kenyans have been lamenting all over the media about a significant mismatch between what these politicians contribute during church harambees vis-à-vis what they earn. This has been a rising public uproar that politicians steal from taxpayers and use the money in churches during campaigns to make people believe that they are strong church believers (saints) and would behave as such when voted in. His use of such language castigates those politicians who use religion as a campaign tool and then perform below par when elected.

**Example 3:** *ndio asinifunganishe bao* (So that he does not impregnate me)

Malika uses the phrase in her poem *Mapenzi Sumu* (Love is toxic). The phrase *ndio asinifunganishe bao* in its literal sense, means 'So that he does not score me a goal.' Other than echoing the field of sports, this phrase has been contextually used to mean that the partner of the poetess was sure of using protection so as not to impregnate her. Scoring here has been semantically stretched to describe the verb impregnate. This amplifies the creativity employed in the genre. Ahmadian & Yazdani (2013) agree that a text is a product of the author's creativity in connecting existing texts.

**Example 4:** *wamekataa vitabu yani ku face book* (They have refused books; I mean to face a book)

The aforementioned example is extracted from Crazy Mwanafunzi's poem *poa mbaya* (Good Bad). This phrase echoes the technological field. Contextually, he said that slay queens are addicted to social media (Facebook) and that's why they have refused to read books (face books). Notably, Sheng spoken word poets are keen to play around with words that create humour while achieving their purpose.

Precisely, the poets infuse these echoes into their work to enable the audience to unearth them. One's familiarity with these existing echoes makes one better placed to give a correct interpretation of the poem. Bell & Gibson (2011) agree that any material only makes sense to the audience if the audience understands the genre's models and, furthermore, understands any intertextual references.

#### 4.1.4. Direct Quotation

Hierarchically, this was the fourth most prevalent technique with 10.3%. Poets took words verbatim from existing religious scriptures, people's statements, English and Kiswahili proverbs/wise sayings, and idiomatic expressions. Poets do not create their texts in a vacuum but directly quote available materials. However, they showcase a lot of creativity in amalgamating these existing materials. Their reliance on existing texts converges with previous scholars like Halliday (2003), who argued that no text can be considered standalone. Below are examples that explicate this technique.

**Example 1:** *Eloi. Eloi Lema Sabachtani hio ndio ilikuwa the last crossword puzzle* (Trans: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? That was the last crossword puzzle).

Teardrops took the above words verbatim from the Bible verse (Mathew 27:46). These were the actual words of Jesus when he was at the cross. In his poem 'Story Come,' he mainly praises Jesus. This phrase amplifies that Jesus paid it all at the cross, and we should wholeheartedly believe in him.

**Example 2:** *Mali safi iende chain* (Trans: Clean commodity should go to chain)

Malika the Poet used the above statement's statement in her poem 'Mapenzi Sumu.' This phrase was taken from a song of a Kenyan rapper, Chris Kaiga. Notably, the above phrase has a different contextual usage in the poem, and this is derived from Sheng. In Sheng, *mali safi* means a beautiful girl. The statement here means a beautiful girl should be taken by a man to his house and copulate. So the girl here becomes the commodity, and she should therefore be taken to the chain (house) to be used. Here, the poet has effectively employed euphemism to underscore that her lover was honest and straightforward forward and she was not expecting to be 'used' and dumped by him.

**Example 3:** *Kuna nuru gizani* (Trans: There's light in darkness).

Crazy Mwanafunzi quoted this phrase directly from Pius Muiro, a famous Kenyan bishop. The bishop had a sermon session whose title was the aforementioned phrase. The poet used it to encourage society that, despite the challenges people face (darkness), they should remain hopeful that, eventually, success (light) would come.

It is evident that Sheng spoken word poets connect numerous quotations from various sources in their texts. As Barthes (1978) notes, any book is a tissue of quotes taken from the countless centres of culture.

#### 4.1.5. Comment/Evaluate a Text or Statement or Otherwise Invoked Voice

Sheng spoken word poets commented on or evaluated a text or statement. This technique (T4) had a prevalence of 7%, emerging as the fifth most prevalent. Again, this was creatively done as discussed below:

**Example 1:** *Hii world inaspin niaje bado una sleep* (Trans: This world spins, why do you still sleep?).

In his 'Conversation,' Thony Voks uses the above phrase. The poet comments on the scientific fact about the Earth. The Earth spins on its axis once every 24-hour day. Contextually, he used it to show the dynamic nature of the world. He encourages people to be abreast of the changes instead of lazing around. In Kenya, it is very common to see people lazing around, especially in urban areas. This is attributed to the country's surging unemployment rate, aggravating disillusionment among Kenyans. Such comments by the poets really make sense, especially with the paradigm shift in Kenya's education system. The new education system, Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), advocates for practical skills in learning to match the global dynamics of the job market; hence, it is important for people to move with these changes, for the world is 'spinning'. Probably, with this, it will be possible for people to earn a living from hands-on activities.

**Example 2:** *Siku hizi injustice ime evolve* (Trans: Nowadays injustice has evolved).

Willie Oeba evaluates Kenya's justice system. In the example above, the poet comments on the injustice perpetrated in the Kenyan courts. There have been numerous incidents where Kenyans take to social media to register their dissatisfaction regarding court verdicts. The poet has provided a specific example where Babu Owino, a Kenyan Member of Parliament, shot DJ Evolve in a certain club over a minor argument. The matter was taken to court, and later, the MP was pardoned by the court; hence, injustice has evolved. Critically, the Kenyan judicial system has not yet undergone full maturity to the level of operating independently. As it stands, justice is seemingly a reserve for the rich.

**Example 3:** *Usidanganywe uvute bangi ati being high is cool* (Trans: Don't be lied to smoke bhang just because being high is cool).

Crazy Mwanafunzi creatively evaluates the phrase 'the higher you go, the cooler it becomes' by refuting it in the context of smoking bhang to feel 'high', which is not cool (good). These artists comment on or evaluate pertinent, relatable societal issues through this genre.

Evidently, Sheng spoken word poets weave existing discourses of technological change, politics, and scientific facts to address issues of advocacy for change, impunity, drug and substance abuse.

#### 4.1.6. Recognisable Phrasing or Terminology Associated with a Particular Group of People or Document.

There were a number of recognisable phrases and terms in the Sheng spoken word poems that are linked to specific groups of people. This technique was the least prevalent technique in the Sheng spoken word poetry, with 5.4%. Such phrases are very common among the Sheng speakers, and one would easily recognize them due to their prevalent usage in physical communication and digital platforms. Such terminologies are: *Machik* (beautiful girls), *doshi* (steel), *mboch* (Househelp), *kuomoka* (getting rich). Generally, these terminologies are associated with Kenyan Sheng speakers. The poets have woven these words to address various societal issues. For instance, Teardrops used the word *machik* to tell the audience that he loves poetry more, and he does poetry out of passion and not to impress beautiful girls.

Thony Voks used the word *doshi* in his poem 'Premium Tears.' In this poem, he mainly expresses his disappointment with his lover. In the Kenyan context, the word refers to a company that manufactures strong steel. The company has been advertising its product of *Chuma ya Doshi* (Doshi steel) on Kenya's Citizen TV. The poet creatively used it to mean phallus. Contextually, he said he was working in a welding shop by the time he was dating the girl, and therefore, she should not claim that the problem that led to her cheating with another man was *doshi* (phallus). Without unpacking the contextual usage, one would easily think he was talking about the steel in the Doshi Company.

Malika the Poet used the word *mboch* in her poem *Mapenzi Sumu* (Love is a poison) to imply that she worked and devoted herself to keep her relationship going. She worked like a housekeeper because she had truly trusted the man who later betrayed her. In her poem 'Dear God,' she presents a situation of hopelessness and requests that God she would wish to be rich /*kuomoka*. She believes in God as the sole provider of richness.

Clearly, Sheng spoken word poets utilize common terminologies to express real issues that are semantically and contextually relevant, such as relationships and religion.

#### 4.2. Homophonic/Homonymic References

The study also found that the Sheng spoken word artists used homophonic and homonymic puns in the creation of their texts. A homophony is where two or more words have similar sounds but carry different meanings (Trott & Bergen, 2020). On the other hand, a homonym is a word with more than one unrelated meaning (Eddington & Tokowisz, 2015). Teardrops used the word *slay* in his statement: *Kina Huddah hao huslay looks, but me huslay giants* (The likes of Huddah slay looks, but I slay giants). Huddah Monroe, a Kenyan socialite, slays to mean she is a 'slayqueen,' and she showcases her looks to earn a living. Contrastingly, the poet has used the word *slay* to refer to himself, that he has King David's genes and therefore, he slays giants just as David slayed Goliath. So, slay here has been used as a homonymic pun. He also used the word 'stage' to mean a stage where buses park to ferry passengers and a stage where

people perform. This was evident in his statement, *Kama singekua msanii basi ningekuwa conductor coz I was destined for the stage* (If I had not been an artist, then I would have been a conductor because I was destined for the stage). All these are found in his first poem, 'Story Come'. In his second poem 'Nataka Dame,' he used the word *foam* in his statement, *nataka dame mwenye hata akiwatch TV Kwa bathroom, soap opera haiwezi toa foam* (I need a girl that even when she watches TV in a bathroom, soap opera cannot produce foam). Here, the word foam, which also sounds like form, has a semantic extension in Sheng. *Form* in Sheng means plan, especially one that brings money, and this is the intended contextual meaning in the poem. The poet intends to describe the girl she wants; she should not be too addicted to TV, or rather, soap operas. She should focus on lucrative activities instead. He has used the word *Passover* to mean *pass over*, which is a homophonic reference. He also uses the word *molar* (a type of tooth) to mean *mola* (a Swahili word meaning God). This is a homophonic pun.

Thony Voks used the Swahili phrase *si Phyllis* (not Phyllis) to mean syphilis. This is a homophonic pun. He also used the word *sarcastic* along with the Sheng phrase *Saka stick* (looking for a stick). This is a homophonic pun. Again, the word *stick* has a semantic extension in Sheng to mean the male sex organ. That his lover claimed he was *sarcastic*, only to realise she was looking for a *stick* (male sex organ). He used such description to lament and intensify a rather critical tone in the poem 'Premium Tears.' He blames a cheating lover. Also, he employs a homonymic pun using the word *Messi* when he used the statement, *Life yangu ilikua Messi so ukaamua kunicheza ki Cristiano* (My life was Messi, so you decided to play me the Cristiano way). He used the word *messi* to mean *Messy* which means dirty/disorganised/chaotic. Still, the word *Messi* is the name of a famous football player from Argentina. Moreover, He used the Swahili word *Bahati*, which means luck, but still, it is someone's name. In Kenya, it is the name of a musician. He employed a homonymic pun with this word in his statement: *Kwa love, I guess sina bahati; nilikupenda ukanicheat, ona sasa nimejawa machozi* (In love, I guess I am not lucky; I loved you, you cheated me; now I am full of tears).

Moreover, Willie Oeba mentioned the word *club* in his statement: *Drunkenness haitolewi na club* (Drunkenness is not removed by a club is not removed by a club). The word *club* here is a homonymic pun. It means the stick that police use to beat people/drunkards or the club where people take alcohol and get drunk. In addition, he employed a homophonic pun of the Swahili word *sina* (I don't have) when he used the word *sinner* in his statement; *apart from kutenda dhambi, mchoyo ana overuse the word sinner* (Apart from sinning, the selfish overuses the word sinner). The *sinner* sounds like *sina*. In this case, he meant *sina* to mean the selfish are fond of saying they don't have whenever they borrow something. Moreover, he used a homophonic pun on *na Eve* (with Eve) and "naive." This was evident in the statement: *I wonder why Adam was so gullible ama niju alikua na Eve?* (I wonder why Adam was so gullible, or is it because he was with Eve?). He did this to create a deliberate ambiguity. Furthermore, he used the word *ward* (for MCAs) and *ward* (hospital ward), which is a homonymic pun.

Other than that, Crazy Mwanafunzi mentioned the word *mwangaza*, which is Meru County's governor in Kenya. The name is also a Swahili word that means light, hence a homonymic pun. Further, he used the statement, *nilitamani kujenga safina, mwalimu akaniambia Crazy Mwanafunzi, hapo umenoa mbaya* (I desired to build an ark, my teacher told me: Crazy Mwanafunzi, you have got it wrong). The poet has deliberately replaced the name Noah, who built an ark, with the Swahili word *noa* (get it wrong) to bring about the intended meaning. Clearly, poets consciously infuse puns in their texts, and they are full of ambiguity. This contrasts with Peter's (2015) study on intertextuality in students' essays, which concluded that students apply intertextuality both consciously and unconsciously. One is required to be keen and familiar with these puns as well as a critical thinker, to be able to disambiguate them and understand the intended contextual usage.

Sheng spoken word poems capitalise on the game of words through homophonic and homonymic puns. In so doing, they create ambiguities that beg the audience to critically think, contextualise, and unearth the poets' intent.

## 5. Conclusion

The study examined techniques of intertextuality in Sheng spoken word poetry in Kenya. Sheng spoken word artists comment on various societal issues such as love and relationships, religion, and politics. It was established that these artists extensively and creatively employ intertextuality through various techniques. They also weave homonymic and homophonic puns in their poems to enhance critical thinking in the audience. Their creativity requires that the audience be keen to unearth the intended contextual meaning of the various woven texts. The various techniques of intertextuality act as clues for the audience to link and correctly interpret the Sheng spoken word poems.

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