

and winners there will be no competition,
there will be no mistake made, and
therefore, no achievement (Bananas, 1993, p. 107).

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TOPIC CONTROL IN THE MARKET DISCOURSE

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Abstract

Human interactions such as between a trader and a customer, involve the process of acting towards a collective goal. Thus, traders and customers cooperate in order to buy from and sell to each other. This, I may call, the cooperative joint action whose achievement is largely dependent on the mutual participation and intimate involvement of the transacting partners. The transacting parties have an innate driving force that motivates them to behave and act in a certain way. Arrazola (1998: p.21) captures this scenario when he says that: an intended collective goal in this sense is based on the goal holding agents interacting in order to satisfy their content of the intention by acting together. I note that transacting partners in the market place have the content of the collective sense and are committed to their intimate goal they wish to achieve. The acting together can be said to be mutual if there is commitment through their individual contribution to the mutual goal at hand.

Key words: Discourse, topic control, market.

Introduction

The data upon which this study builds are the audio-taped interactions between the trader and the customer as they engaged each other in the bargaining encounter. In order to explicate the pertinent issues pertaining to this study, this researcher collected the corpus data from the two open-air markets, i.e., Gikomba open-air market and Kongowea open-air market. The market discourse data that was used in this paper has been arranged and presented appropriately while focusing on issues pertaining to topic sustenance in market transactions. I worked from transcripts containing words and linguistic utterances that were produced by consecutive speakers. Thereafter, I rendered the corpus data that occurs as consecutive turns for analysis. The turns which were sequentially organized were presented as an act sequence in light of the relation between the discourse contributions to one another by using the following format: TRADER(T:); CUSTOMER(C:).

The adjacent utterances are placed side by side, paradigmatically. This format is theoretically appropriate for the market discourse as the interactants often link their individual utterances with their own preceding utterances. Evidently, the market discourse is not an encounter of power and exploitation, as neither party controls the conversational floor, and that there is a smooth transfer of speakership between the trader and the customer. In this paper, I undertake an in-depth analysis of topic initiation, and sustenance in trader-customer Kiswahili discourse. I set out to answer the following questions: how do the discourse participants manage and sustain their mutual topics? How do they develop and control the discourse topics in this interactional encounter? Which strategies do the discourse participants employ in this interaction so that it revealingly comes out as a coherent unit? In this light, I follow Yule's (1983: p.89) argument that in any verbal interaction, participants normally engage in a variety of mutual topics. Such topics, as Coulthard (1977) contends, are assumed to be relevant and safe. I therefore, investigate how various topics in this discourse are mutually generated and transactionally ratified by the discourse participants to the extent that they facilitate the development of their mutual understanding of the discourse at hand.

Topic Initiation and Sustenance in the Market Discourse

In trader-customer Kiswahili discourse, the participants, through linguistic utterances of various types, initiate and develop mutually acceptable topics that largely sustain the transactional exchange. I note that since this is a business interaction, it often takes several turn exchanges, and in this respect, the floor is evenly controlled or distributed by the participants. The two discourse participants are aware of the fact that the

transactional exchange is an exercise that points to the mutual sharing of the floor, by way of producing relevant utterances and mutually acceptable topics. Topic of a discourse is a proposition entailed by the joint set of propositions expressed by the sequence (Van Dijk 1977). In this case, I investigate what a turn or a sequence of turns is all about. Essentially, the topic is the thing that is talked about, yet each party has different views about the topic. Language users have the ability to produce and interpret discourses with respect to a given topic. They are also able to change a topic and to perceive such a topic change in an interaction.

A verbal interaction such as this is always viewed as a co-achievement where the interactants work together to ratify the mutual topics for the benefit of the transacting partners. Against this background, I assert that when one participant is found to be developing and controlling a topic in a given floor, s/he is the turn holder. A floor in which one floor holder can be identified is a single person floor. Floor holders may systematically use supportive backchannel cues, but they may become more actively involved and thereby, produce short segments of talk. Backchannels are the interactants' minimal responses which show that the interactants are in mutual understanding of their discourse. Such minimal responses would include small words like: *eeh, naam! eem! Kabisa*, and other such linguistic utterances. When the topic of conversation is the kind of information that does not solely belong to one particular participant, then conversation may develop even more collaboratively as each party will be motivated to participate due to the benefits that may accrue from the same. As such, transacting partners tend to collaborate mutually for the sake of sustaining an exchange that may turn out to be fruitful. In open-air market exchange, an interactant's utterance indicates that the bargain-exchange has just been initiated. In this turn, it is the customer who opens the discourse, by producing a phatic turn: C: *Habari yako Mami?* (How are you mom?). The trader responds: T: *Nzuri* (Fine).

The two discourse participants are aware of the importance of the greeting component of this encounter. They know that for the bargain exchange to bear fruit, then, it must begin on a friendly note. These two turns are significant to this discourse interactants as they constitute a friendly tone: every discourse has to contain a language structure that not only acts as medium for transmitting information, but also as a medium for constructing and maintaining interpersonal relationships. In this manner, 'caring', and "cooperating" also turn out to be ways of communicating. I, therefore, realize that cooperativeness in trader-customer Kiswahili conversation is achieved when the two interactants consider each other's feelings and ideas as important. They, therefore, start their

conversation by giving the other person an opportunity to feel welcome to the bargain activity, before introducing the purpose and direction of their transaction.

The two interactants find it prudent to treat each other with respect, courtesy, and consideration, while responding to each other's requests and suggestions. The greeting sequence, for instance points to the fact that the two are showing an interest in each other, as each takes time to find out each other's feelings. Cameron (2000) underscores the importance of this aspect of language, when she says that one finds techniques for efficiently and nonchalantly "handling" people wherever one looks in the public institutions of the modern world and that one finds what we may refer to as synthetic personalization, a compensatory tendency to give an impression of treating each other as unique individuals. In this regard, she gives such examples from the would-be air travel (have a nice day!), restaurants, (welcome to wimpy!) and the stimulated conversation (e.g., chat shows) and bonhomie which litter the media.

Essentially, the greeting sequence eloquently underscores the significance of the greeting forms in the trader-customer Kiswahili discourse. I note that it is the customer who produces the greeting turn. He says: C:*Habari yako Mami?* (How are you mom?); the trader (T) responds appropriately: *Nzuri* (Just fine). From these two turns, it is apparently that the two interactants respect and value the worth of each other. In a way, they seem to be implying that they are willing to start a fruitful encounter. The young man seems to be implying that he is willing to relate with the trader who may be as elderly as his own mother. I can therefore infer that the customer will interact with the trader in a respectful manner. The trader on the other hand, is willing to cooperate with her interlocutor, as she responds appropriately to the customer's greetings. The next turn introduces the customer's intention: inquiring about the availability of a striped shirt. Specifically, he says: C:*Ah! Nilikuwa nakuuliza...nilikuwa nataka. Nilikuwa ninataka shati yenye stripes...unajua shati yenye inawaliwa na mapaster....Mambo na kama mapaster.* (Ah, I wanted to ask you... I wanted to buy a striped shirt... you know, one that is normally worn by pastors... one that pastors prefer).

I note that the customer has introduced a topic that may not necessarily relate to the inherent discourse framework: buying and selling. When he says that he needs to buy a shirt that is worn by pastors, he seems to be pragmatically informed of the background and contextual information pertaining to pastors. Pastors are religious leaders who normally, by virtue of their profession, are expected to put on decent clothes. It is instructive to note that this topic of conversation contains some information that can only be recoverable from the participants shared

experiences. If this is not taken into consideration, then the conversation will be impaired. As such, this encounter seems to be largely cooperative in the sense that the two interactants are deeply and intimately involved in the bargain exercise. I refer to some sections of the market transaction so as to show how the particular lexical items and phrases are closely related to the discourse topics that phrases are: at least *tusaidiane*, (:C); *Nguo inategemea na bei yake ya wholesale*, (:T); *Nieleze tu. Mimi ni binadamu*, (:C) *biashara ni biashara.* (:T); *Kaizari apewe cha..* () *chake.* (:T); *Fungu la kumi* (:C).

I observe at this point that the two parties are talking about a variety of issues as they engage each other in the bargaining encounter. They cooperatively talk about issues that are not directly related to the discourse of bargaining. They, therefore talk about the lifestyle of religious leaders (Pastors' lifestyles), Jesus (religious matters), and Tithing/ *fungu la kumi* (*helping the poor and the less fortunate*). In this case, I point out that in this discourse, a transaction may cover more than just one topical issue at any given time and that the initiation of such topics largely lacks clear markers. Nevertheless, there is a sequential progression of the transaction, and in light of the CA framework, the APs are appropriately placed, turns are structured in an acceptable manner and topics are well managed. This is why I argue that in this discourse, the transacting partners exhibit a considerable degree of tolerance for clarity.

I therefore claim that this transactional exchange is mutual and cooperative because the trader and the customer are consistently talking about the same discourse topic: exchanging goods. This is why I argue that topic is a broad entity that constitutes elements that are related in a specific way. The various topics are negotiated by the two discourse partners who seem to be speaking about various life issues such as business, giving to Caesar what is rightfully his due, among others. I pay particular attention to a few turns so as to clarify our claim. In the following turn, the customer seems to be prepared for a compromise bargain. Specifically, he says: .C:*Ni kwa sababu nimechangacha at least tusaidiane kwa hivo, nivumilie ndio nimeshapata na kama umetupiza ubao nimeshapata...na kama ni kula, tule sote, kuliko... nikule mikate kila siku, hapo hapo nitakuwa ninaumia mami* (It is because I have been soliciting for monies, so that we help each other. So, bear with me as this is all I can pay... if it means fairness, then let each one of us should benefit, mom). In this transactional discourse, the various topics that come on board inherently cohere with the central discourse topic. The cited turn is typical of the discourse of bargain that has nothing to do with one party winning and the other, losing. That the customer is willing to compromise (Tusaidiane) is enough evidence that this discourse is about bargain strategies that benefit both parties. This turn necessarily points to the dictates of

a negotiation, where related topics or issues are linked together, and this is a strategy that leads us to a defined outcome: The trader has to sell at a profit and the customer expects to get a fair deal from the transactional exchange. So as to sustain the conversation, the two discourse participants take up topics that significantly relate directly to the central theme of the exchange event. I highlight some of the sections that are particularly useful in this regard: T: *Nguo inategemea na bei yake ya wholesale, sasa kusema ukweli siwezi kujilazimisha nikuuzie vile umesema kwa sababu umesema. Inategemea nimeipata kwa ngapi na ninakwambia ile bei umetaja upande huuna upande huu.* (The price of each cloth has to do with the buying price and I wouldn't sell it at a loss, just because you need it. The selling price depends largely on the buying price).

One feature of this transaction that seems particularly characteristic of the discourse of bargain is the fact that the participants are in constant evaluation and interpretation of each other's turns. In fact, every preceding utterance by either party can be regarded as an attempt to influence each other's perspective so that they can act in a specific way. This attempt can be successful if and only if the preceding utterances are related to the central concern of the discourse objective. The customer relates his utterance to the preceding utterance by talking about the same subject: buying of the shirt. The same lexical item (*shati*—shirt), keeps recurring. This indicates that the participants have not deviated from the central concern of the transaction. But as the discourse progresses, I encounter some utterances, whose interpretation largely depends on the context of production. In this case, the customer says: *Nieleze tu, mimi ni binadamu* (Just tell me, I am a human being).

This utterance can be understood in the light of the participants' desire to change the topic of the conversation, so as to minimize boredom. I assume that the utterance is in line with the strategy of inclusion, the notion of inclusion or participation framework refers to the collaborative need of the discourse interactants who desire to belong to each other so as to mutually achieve particular goals of the transaction. In keeping with this approach, participants constitute a particular participation framework at any given moment and at any particular moment. An interactant can call attention to a particular participation framework by specifying a central theme by which they i.e. the trader and the customer can be identified. This interactional practice is used as a strategy by participants to include other co-present participants in interaction. When the customer says that he also is a human being, (*Mwanadamu*), he seems to be engaging in an interaction with the trader in an inclusive manner. In this exchange, the customer employs this participation framework, by identifying with, first of all, the human race, and by the same token, his interlocutor.

He seems to be calling upon the trader to be more understanding as a human being should, by selling the cloth at a reasonable price. I view this discourse event as a contextually bound interaction that largely displays the interactants' orientation to one another as equal and mutually benefiting participants. This line of arguments seems to run through the entire discourse, in a manner that borders on the dictates of cooperation and collaboration. In this case, the trader implies that she is being reasonable and fair in quoting the particular price. The trader decides to justify the price by insisting that in business, one has to make profit. She says: *Siwezi nikakuuzia mia mbili kwa sababu katika biashara, tunatafuta kitu* (I won't sell this cloth to you at two hundred shillings because in business one has to make some profit). It is not clear why the trader insists that she has to make profit. I argue that the trader is being fallacious as she is not willing to quote her cost price, a situation that could have revealed 'fairness' on her part. This, however, remains her secret, and she can only argue that she can't sell at a loss. This sense may not be accessible to an observer who does not interpret this utterance in light of the discourse. From this utterance, I deduce an interpretation, thus: i) the trader quotes a price which may not be quite reasonable to the customer; ii) the customer contests the price and appeals for compromise; and, iii) the trader appeals for understanding as she is not willing to sell at a loss. She, however, does not backup her claim that she, indeed, may be about to sell the item at a loss.

In trader-customer Kiswahili discourse, prices are not fixed. The trader may sell her commodities at any price, yet she expects to get some reasonable profit from her sales. The customer, on the other hand, must contest the quoted price if he has to get a 'fair' deal from the transactional exchange. This state of affairs, characteristic of this discourse, calls for the negotiation of every aspect of the exchange event. This is the kind of situation that necessarily and legitimately calls for topic shift from time to time. It seems that both parties are persistently seeking for a fair deal. This claim is supported from the open-air market encounter, as each party keeps on demonstrating that bargaining is a mutual activity. In a bargaining zone such as this, I expect each party to make proposals and corresponding counter-proposals as they keep on negotiating over the price of the cloth. The opening offer may just be inaccessible and unrealistic, and the other party, the customer, will be expected to respond by quoting a price that is low. The trader makes his opening offer in a way that is clear, brief and confident and thereby tells the customer about her (trader's) desire to reach an amicable agreement. Since the trader needs to sell the cloth, she finds it necessary to quote a realistic

offer or price, and as the transactional exchange progresses, the two interactants introduce and ratify particular topics that advance and promote their common ground.

In one of the turns, the customer talks of Jesus as 'never failing'. He talks of Jesus as benefiting directly from the transaction as would the trader or the customer. At this juncture, one is left wondering as to the legitimacy and relevance of the customer's utterance, relative to the discourse at hand. If a serious discourse such as this has to progress cooperatively and collaboratively, then the interactants will be expected to initiate relevant and appropriate topics that will necessarily enhance and promote the transactional encounter and thereby enabling them (participants) to achieve their mutual goals.

I point out that in trader-customer Kiswahili discourse, there are no 'operational' rules that sanction the introduction or termination of (any) topic(s) and in this case, it is up to the interactants to work out the relevance or otherwise of the various topics that may feature in this discourse. The customer seems to be trying to persuade the trader to reduce the price for, in doing so, she would be understood to be advancing the cause of Christianity: helping the poor and unfortunate in the society. The customer finds it necessary to introduce this topic which, in a way, may go a long way in pushing for flexibility from both parties. In this light, the customer is asking the trader to sell the cloth at a reasonably low price, instead of soliciting for a profit which could as well be channeled to the concerned parties. This, the customer argues, is an unnecessarily excruciating exercise that should be avoided by the trader. The trader does not really agree with the customer. She says: T: *Fungu la kumi nalipeanga pale na litafika*. (I know how and where to channel the tithe). In this turn, the customer insists that she has to sell at a profit, and thereafter surrender the tithe to the right religious people. The trader's utterance does not augur well with the customer, who explains his intentions of being assisted. He says: C: *Kwa hivyo huwezi kunisaidia kwa sababu...* (So you can't help me because...).

The market discourse seems to point to the fact that I should interpret the market interaction, in line with Schegloff (1997) who claims that the events of a conversation have a sense and import to the participants, as revealingly displayed by each successive contribution. In tandem with this line of argument, Richards (1999) explains that it is necessary to establish the relevance of any new topic to the foregoing talk and also to show why "unconnected" change of subject is not explicitly signaled. However, in a social context, there may be

rules of interaction which will determine the distribution of speaker rights, the range of relevant topics, etc., thus constraining the options available to the participants in this talk exchange. From the examples that I have cited, it is apparent that in trader-customer Kiswahili discourse, topics are initiated and easily changed by either the trader or the customer. This is to suggest that in this discourse, topics are suddenly introduced as and when it is deemed necessary by the concerned parties. In other words, any topic that is brought on board is relevant to the mutual goal of the transaction. As such, in the interest of the benefits that may accrue from the transaction, either party is expected to be polite and pleasant to the other party as shown by the following turn: T: *Hata hakuna cha kusaidiana, kama ni biashara ni biashara. Kaizari apewe cha...chake*. (This has nothing to do with helping each other. The dictates of business must be adhered to. We should give to Caesar...). In the cited turn, the trader slightly changes the topic but in so doing keeps an eye on the inherent transaction. She insists that business is about give and take in the sense of willing buyer-willing-seller dictum. The phrase that prominently strikes our mind is: *Kaizari apewe chake* (Give to Caesar what belong to Caesar).

Perhaps the question to ask in relation to this phrase is: who is Caesar, and what is it that should be given to him? The answer to this question lies in the very fact that in a negotiation, each party is expected to benefit. If this interpretation is near-accurate, then Caesar, in this context, may refer either be the trader or the customer. This interpretation emanates from the fact that the two parties are constantly negotiating for a compromise situation that benefits both of them. The interaction will be deemed mutually beneficial if and when each party gets closer to an agreement, so that the buyer/customer gets the goods in exchange for the acceptable and reasonable price. This agreement, however, is not easy to come by, and as such, it has to be negotiated from time to time. By referring to such issues, the co-interlocutors are trying to achieve a common ground with each other. When they talk about business as well as issues that have to do with the market context, they are essentially implying that every topic is relevant to the context of the interaction and that they are being polite to each other as they engage each other in a topical talk.

Talking topically means that the discursive interactants are making relevant linguistic contributions to the transactional exchange in light of the dictates of the transaction. The customer talks of '*tusaidiane*' (we help each other), *kama ni kula tule zote*' (If we have to benefit then both of us should benefit)'. This actual talk develops more in the direction of a meaningful bargain, in the sense that the customer seems to be implying that in a bargain event such as this, either party is expected to exhibit a high degree of flexibility. This flexibility will

necessarily give them an opportunity to reach an agreement as soon as it may be practically possible. And throughout this transactional exchange, it would appear that the two interactants are flexible so that the issues or topics they introduce and ratify are long or short, some-time they may be loose and associative yet are understood to be relevant to the transaction. I claim that the trader and the customer do not just introduce topics that have no bearing to the expected and projected direction of the transactional exchange as demonstrated by the following turn when the customer says: C: *Nieleze tu, mimi ni mwanadamu* (just tell me, I am also a human being). The customer's contribution to this transactional exchange absurd as it may seem, is relevant to the bargain activity. The trader's response, does not contradict the prior turn, which means, the two interactants are able to establish local links by producing informative and coherent contributions. By cooperatively producing relevant turns, at least in the perspective of their interlocutors, they signal and imply that they are contributing to maintaining and developing the transactional topic. When the customer says that he is "*Mwanadamu*" (a human being), the trader goes on to make his contribution to the transactional exchange, without necessarily asking inquisitive questions about the "*Mwanadamu*" notion. He does not display interest in finding out what this "*Mwanadamu*" is all about. This AP sequence is a typical marker of the common ground so that the progression of the talk allows the participants to exploit their common knowledge (*Mwanadamu*) of the current stage of the discourse topic, and also to project its conclusion, but not before the transaction is conclude: *Siwezi kukuuzia mia mbili kwa sababu katika biashara tunatafuta kitu* (I can't sell this shirt for two hundred shillings only for in this business we must make profit). The customer responds thus: O.k. This AP sequence provides room for an extended talk.

In a bargain event such as this, the interactants are aware of the fact that they are engaged in an extended talk that is collaboratively ratified. This may be the reason why the customer, seems to agree with the trader's prior turn by saying: O.k. He therefore produces a turn that seems to elaborate on the matter at hand: selling at a profit. I point out that the two discourse participants are cooperative and collaborative in this bargain exchange, which consequently enables the transactional exchange to proceed progressively. It appears that in this discourse, the interlocutors progressively introduce and ratify the interactional topics, as long as there is something more to say about them. In the market discourse, the customer seems to imply that the trader needs to be more 'serious' or understanding (*Ukiwa umekasirika*), and in the turn that follows; the trader seems to have misunderstood the prior turn, and interprets it literary "*to be angry*".

In her contribution, she explains that she would not be angry/annoyed whatsoever. So as to bring the conversation back on track, the customer repairs his contribution by saying: *Eeh, na ukiwa umekasirika?* (How much would you sell this, if you are a bit serious?).

Generally the progressivity of this bargain-exchange seems to include the form and content of their topics. On the form side, this may mean that the talk should be a continuous strand, so that infelicitous responses are minimized as much as possible. On the side of the content, progressivity means that the participants need to add new information (*Ukiwa umekasirika*) which means that they must deliberately expound the common ground of their participation. Thus, each turn is expected to contribute to the progressivity and sustenance of the discourse. It appears that any topic that does not contribute to the progression of the transaction may necessarily give rise to implicatures which will still be interpreted as being informative albeit at a deeper level. What is involved here is Gricean quantity maxim and more specifically, the sub-maxim: "make your contribution as informative as is required" As the conversational interaction progresses, the trader realizes that her interlocutor may not be a potential buyer after all, and thereby, she seems to reject the buyer's offer, by withdrawing the article of trade. This brings us to the following AP.

C: *Na ukirudisha inamaanisha hutaki twende nayo* (if you withdraw this cloth, then it means that you don't want us to buy it).

T: *Mimi siwezi kukataa* (I wouldn't refuse to sell it). From this AP, it seems that the trader is just about to break with the mainstream topic. His utterance displays some coherence with the prior discourse and as such, the utterance fits into the local organization of the talk, so that it contributes to the progression of the matter under discussion. In this case, each and every turn is a worthy contribution to the conversation. The same argument hold true for the turn: C: "Jesus never failing", as well as for the turn: T: "*Kaizari apewe chake*" (give to Caesar what is rightfully his). One may just want to ask what prompts the change of topic in light of the discourse at hand. The two discourse participants talk about "Jesus" and "Caesar" and their conversational contribution in such a manner that it is pleasant and acceptable to their interlocutors. The validity of this line of argument arises from the fact that the interaction is largely incoherent. In any case, the participants do not close the current "unfinished" topic and hence, they create an opportunity space for introducing new topics. They simply launch a new topic while the current topic is still in progress.

Our central argument is that the two discourse participants orient to the current topic as a familiar and recognizable unit of conversation, and, though they can't project its direction, the continuity of the bargain-

exchange is guaranteed. Since one topic leads to another, contribution and counter-contribution to the bargain exchange may be seen as a procedural signal that the topic is potentially significant, and since it has not been exhausted, closing it too soon might be uncalled for thing to do. Consequently, the discourse progresses as two co-interlocutors are evidently cooperative by talking about issues that maybe distantly related. They, for instance, talk about bargaining, Jesus and Caesar. In this case, they seem to bring on board, such topical issues which largely contribute to the coherence of the discourse. The issues that they talk about are not directly related, yet they are related to the central discourse topic: bargaining. The various topical issues are related to bargaining in the sense that the two parties are aware that this is a market place where prices of various goods are not fixed. Moreover, in this open-air market, one will always come across second hand goods whose price is subject to the discourse of bargain.

This far, it is apparent that the two discourse participants are producing and relating the various mutual topics to the discourse of bargain. The topics are essentially relevant to the context of bargain as the trader and the customer are in full control of this event. Each of their utterances cohere to the central framework of this discourse. Against this background, I interpret and understand such phrases as ‘*tusikilizane*’ (Let’s compromise), “*Nikuongeze fifty*” (I will add fifty shillings), ‘*Tutaweza kuelewana,*’ (We will compromise)’ etc. All these lexical items and phrases are directly relevant to the context of bargain, where every other item, issue or even relationship has to be negotiated. In this respect, the market discourse demands that its participants are aware of the various issues that inform that particular context, which could include (‘but need not be limited to) market situation, the social roles of the interactants, the bargain process as well as the mutual understanding of their world of bargain. All these aspects of context point to the central topic framework of the discourse. In other words, the trader and the customer always interpret and understand each others’ utterances as well as the topical issues as they continue transacting by way of asking/answering questions, inquiring or giving the necessary description of the discourse event. The discourse interactants are aware of the fact that the market discourse is largely dictated by the power of bargain, so that nothing can be said to be fixed.

The customer, in the following turn, introduces discourse topics in such a manner that appeals to the whole idea of a relationship. In this turn, the customer says: *Hapo ni mwisho wako. Eehe! Wajua mami ndiye niliye... nilikupata ukilala, we ni kama mamangu umesikia? We ni kama mamangu. Umesikia hauwezi kupata amako mahalianaumia ukamwacha hivyo hivyo akiumia. Eehe! mnasaidiana na mami mi sitakudanganya lazima we pia una mtoto kama mimi mahali fulani. Sasa inafaa*

tusaidiane na Mungu atakubariki. Mungu atakubariki. (That is my final offer. You know am the one who... I found you asleep... you are like my mother, do you understand. You know, you won’t find your mother languishing in pain and decide not to assist her. Eehee! You must assist one another, and I can tell you with certainty, that I am like one of your sons. So we should help one another and God will help you. God will bless you). The customer focuses on the interpersonal dimension of his relationship with the trader. By using such phrases as ‘*wajua mami*, (you know mom), *wewe ni kama mamangu, wa sikia, wewe ni kama mamangu*, (you are like my mother, do you understand?), *lazima wewe pia una mtoto kama mimi mahali fulani*, (you must be having a child like me somewhere) etc. One may be at a loss in trying to understand the pragmatic import of this turn, relative to the bargain activity.

By using these phrases, the customer makes an attempt at reinforcing personal and near-intimate relationship with the trader. By persistently using the same phrases over and over again, the customer is deeply involved in establishing and maintaining that new found relationship. It is worth mentioning that in this discourse, the trader and the customer employ various strategies so sustain the transaction. They introduce several safe topics in the course of their interaction as they move closer and closer to the end of their transaction. This strategy plays a pivotal role in maintaining a collaborative transaction which is characteristic of this transaction.

The interactants will always want to establish and strengthen the transactional bond between them. Since this discourse is a mutual venture, all the topics that the interactants bring on board are, pragmatically speaking, a demonstration that bargaining is a coordinated activity. I cite a few more examples so as to explicate our argument. The market interactants deliberately change the topic by using relevant and appropriate linguistic features such as phatic expressions, ‘*si kwa ubaya*’, (not with bad intentions)’ “*mimi pia ni Mkristo,*” (I am a Christian also), and the like.

The turns that I have cited present a typical characteristic feature of the market discourse: persuasion. In these turns, the two discourse interactants engage each other in a persuasive or seductive encounter, with particular intentions and reasons. It is in this light that the customer says: *Kwa roho safi, si kwa ubaya wala is kwa madharau, kwa sababu mimi pia ni mkristo* (Not with bad intentions, nor malice but because I am a Christian). From this utterance, I realize that the customer is being seductive. The customer knows that he has to employ wit if he has to get a fair deal from the transactional exchange.

At this point, one may ask at this juncture: why would the two interactants encroach on issues pertaining to matters of faith. Specifically, what has Christianity (*Ukristo*) to do with trader-customer Kiswahili discourse? I realize that trader-customer Kiswahili transactions need

to be sustained to the extent that topics that will be initiated will cohere with the central concern of the mutual goal of the transaction. That the conversation has to go on necessarily means that the participants acknowledge that there is an issue that has to be handled carefully. This also means that one topic doesn't and cannot continue indefinitely. The two participants find it necessary to lead each other to the next or other ideas, and in a way, this enables them to minimize boredom. That the customer cites an issue pertaining to Christianity, clearly demonstrates that the interactants are aware of their total way of life including matters that are socio-economic, political and religious.

From this exchange, it is apparent that the interactants find it necessary to share enough background information, by ascertaining that each topic that is introduced into the conversation is interpreted and understood as contributing to the core objective of the interaction. Once the interactants exhaustively conclude one topic, they are free to shift to the next or other topics as long as they are relevant to the discourse at hand. It is in this light that the phrase, "*Mimi pia ni mkristo* (I am also a Christian)", could be interpreted as revealing the deep-seated feelings and attitudes of the interactants.

As I said earlier, business is about bargaining and as such, each interactant would wish to get a fair deal from the transactional encounter. In this particular instance, the customer seems to be implying that since both of them belong and subscribe to the same faith, then they share a common background and perspective to the extent that they can possibly agree on almost anything. Then the customer realizes that he doesn't capture and influence his interlocutor's perspective.

The turns cited above demonstrate that the market discourse has to continue because the interactants have not agreed on an acceptable price. This also implies that the purpose of the interaction has not been achieved, and as such, the discourse will not just come to an abrupt end without ensuring that all the aspects of the bargain activity have been exhausted. As was noted earlier, trader-customer Kiswahili discourse participants largely draw their interaction resources from the market context. If they are to interact meaningfully for their mutual benefit, then they will have to understand and thereby exploit context of their interaction. They, for instance, know that the market situation demands that they will have to negotiate as buyers and sellers, and that the bargain as transactional activity may change their situation. The two interactants are aware that they are in the real world of bargain.

In this world of bargain, the interactants are indeed in the process of competition. Bargaining, therefore, should be seen as an activity in which meaning and sense are negotiated in light of the immediate task at stake. For as long as the two interactants have not achieved their inherent discourse objective, they will purposely

guarantee the continuity of the interaction, by introducing and linking appropriate topics to their mutual goals of the transactional exchange. The co-interlocutors are indeed interacting topically as they are contributing to the same transaction event so that each utterance is seen to be developing the topic framework. In the following turn for instance, the customer decides to engage in self-praise. He says: .C:...Nimetembea Webuye, nimetembea Eldoret, nimekuja mariakani...na hapa sasa Kongowea...sijapata mama mwenye roho ngumu kama were (I have been to Webuye, Eldoret, Mariakani, and now Kongowea. I have never met a stubborn lady like you).

As the transactional encounter progresses, I was tempted to think that the customer is annoyed since he doesn't seem to attain his objective. This is a likely interpretation, but a closer introspection of the encounter brings to bear the fact that the discourse does not come to an instant halt, and since this is a market situation, the participants engage each other in a competitive bargain. They therefore use whatever strategy that there may be within their disposal to keep the conversation going. In this regard, Alila & Pedersen (2001) argue that small scale enterprises operate at competitive, homogenous grounds where strategies and decisions about the price and quantity of goods to be bought, are made.

Economic and social relations are highly interdependent and the competitiveness of the enterprise depends on social relations. This revealingly points to a bargain process that depends on social relations that have or are expected to prevail in the market context. In the market context, the spirit of interdependence and cooperation demands that the interlocutors forge a common understanding that enables them to bargain reasonably and acceptably. As such, their seemingly common understanding of the dictates of the market discourse contributes to their ability to discern the meanings inherent in the transactional discourse. As such, the various topical issues that transcend the market discourse largely arise from the needs, goals as well as the lifestyle of the interactants.

An understanding prevails when they inherently know when and where it will be permissible to produce particular utterances, besides initiating conversational topics that are related to the context of interaction. I explicate a few utterances, so as to demonstrate the relevance of every contribution to this transactional exchange. The following phrases litter this transactional encounter.

C: *Ni corruptions* (This is corruption on your part).

T: *Biashara naifanya straight* (I engage in acceptable and genuine business).

C: *No corruptions. Si Kibaki alisema corruption tuzime tolerance...* (There is no corruption; didn't (President) Kibaki advise that we exercise zero tolerance on corruption...?).

The examples that I have cited above point to the fact that the two interactants have indeed declared themselves open to each other for purposes of achieving their mutual interactional goals. It emerges from the cited turns that the two interactants have no control over the conversational topics, yet they deliberately work out and maintain the flow of the conversation. I therefore argue that in trader-customer transactions, topics may follow each other without much of a systematic connection, i.e. topics are initiated in isolation, yet, the market discourse is coherent, at least to the parties concerned, due to the turn-sequencing through which various topics are initiated and either terminated prematurely or are sustained to their ultimate closure. This arises from the fact that in the market discourse, each party is essentially expected to cooperate fully if only for the sake of ensuring that the bargain encounter succeeds. In other words, the two parties are in control of their transaction even when they occasionally initiate and possibly ratify other topics that are mutually exclusive. They manage to follow the direction the topic of conversation takes. It is in this light that I understand the meaning of: *Biashara naifanya straight...*, (I engage in genuine business); No corruptions (I am not corrupt). *Si Kibaki alisema corruption tuzime tolerance* (Didn't President Kibaki advise that we should not entertain corruption).

I claim that in this discourse, there are no rules at play for smoothing out the transition from one topic of conversation to another. The two participants have availed themselves for the bargain activity, and as such, they are said to be maintaining the inherent focus of the interaction. If the conversation has to succeed, then the two interactants have to exercise self-control, and dignity, so that they will take their turns and initiate conversational topics at the appropriate time. This ensures that order is maintained in consonance with the fact that each conversational interactant has a contribution to make. The transactional exchange shouldn't be allowed to degenerate. As we move closer to the end of the conversational exchange, I realize that this exchange will not, after all, translate into a meaningful business bargain.

From the market transaction, I deduce that the encounter was friendly and effective. An encounter such as this need not necessarily translate into a fruitful bargain in the sense that there will have to be an exchange of goods (and services, if any), but should progress with the interpersonal goal in mind: these interactants will possibly need each other in future. The trader knows the authenticity of this fact, as demonstrated in the following turn: *Unajua, kama mzazi akitaka kuishi vizuri na watoto wake, habishani nao* (You know, if a parent loves his children, he doesn't become quarrelsome with them). It is apparent that the two are transacting at the interpersonal level, in view of

mutual dependency of the interactants. I therefore can infer that the trader depends on the customer in much the same way as the parents or children depend on each other.

One characteristic feature that is pertinent in the development of the topic framework in trader-customer Kiswahili discourse has to do with the initiation and development of the various topical issues. This feature suggests that in the market transactions, one topic is initiated, ratified and consequently terminated before the interlocutors initiate another. In this regard, the participants ensure that they have exhaustively met the needs and objectives of the bargain and, from time to time, either party is free to address the concerns or contributions of his/her interlocutor, without necessarily following particular rules. In this discourse, therefore, topics are initiated, negotiated and shifted freely, and should there be no reasons to pursue further a certain topic, and then interlocutors have the option of abandoning the discourse topic by taking leave of each other.

From the cited turns I realize that the topic that is being pursued here is the concept of truthfulness on the part of the interlocutors. If this discourse were about truth, then the participants wouldn't have to engage each other in such a protracted interaction as the prices would just be markedly fixed. Apparently, this is not the case as the two interactants argue it out. Each party works towards a common understanding or compromise. This interaction is a collaborative venture, in the sense that the bargain activity is contextually constituted and sustained with its focus on the collective and mutual gains that will ultimately accrue from the transaction. In this respect, context refers to the circumstances in which a transaction takes place. In the market setting, context would entail the transactional participants, the mutual topic of the encounter as well as the place or situation of the encounter.

This researcher observed that in the market situation, the trader and the customer are aware of the fact that prices are not fixed, and as such, they have to engage each other in a protracted transaction. Against this background, I can meaningfully assert that trader-customer Kiswahili discourse is not about the truthfulness or otherwise of the interlocutor's utterances. Grice's maxim of quality accounts for the fact that the transacting partners will not be untruthful to each other as this may demoralize the co-partner. Since the market is a bargain zone, the interlocutors, i.e. trader and customer, must carry out their own negotiation.

In this bargaining zone, the two parties are aware of the fact that they are in a collaborative environment, and as I indicated earlier, they are little concerned with the frontiers of truthfulness or otherwise of their interactional encounter. They have no need for elaborate ideas on how truth is constituted, proven and marked, yet they

wouldn't really belabor whatever "truth" that may be processed by either party. In order for the two parties to bargain reasonably, and in an attempt to enjoy a rewarding experience from the said interaction, the participants have an equal share to the sustenance and flow of the discourse. Besides, the participants seem to willingly and randomly select whatever topic that could keep the conversation going. The remaining section of this business encounter attests to the foregoing discussion. It is now apparent that the transaction is about to close. I highlight some of the turns which revealingly contain the various topics that inform this discourse. In these turns, the trader seems to have made up her mind in so far as this interaction is concerned. She doesn't look forward to selling her cloth at a throw away price. She says: *Uamuzi ni wako* (It is up to you now/you can make up your mind now). As the discourse progresses, the customer seems to suggest that since he is buying second-hand items, then he has to be careful as to how much he has to pay. Specifically, he says: *Hii naweza vaa kweli? Hii ni mpaka tupige pasi* (Can I really put on this cloth? It first needs to be ironed).

In this bargaining zone, one would expect a situation where the give and take would be the preferred order, yet each party seems to belittle the worth of whatever suggestion that comes along. Before the interaction comes to an ultimate close, the concerned parties engage each other by touching-off safe topics that are not necessarily meant to sustain the conversation. For instance, the trader: *Hapa ofisini kwangu, hapo natolewa na giza* (This is my office, I could close it late into the night). This turn thematically corresponds with the trader's says: *wajua mimi na-enjoy tu* (You know, I am just enjoying my work). From this turn, this transaction does not really meet the mutual expectations and objectives of the interactants.

As it closes, the interlocutors haphazardly initiate topics that have no significance and direct bearing to the discourse at hand. However, in an event where the discourse participants are not looking forward to a rewarding transactional experience, one would expect a situation such as this, where the topics are initiated and are subsequently underdeveloped altogether. As the transaction progresses, the interactants are seen to be immersed in the bargain activity to the point that they are willing to talk about other so-called superior races as the whites. They also easily talk about social affairs in which they imply that they are alive to social and sexual relationships. From this encounter, it becomes apparent that the two parties are free to engage each other in talking about almost any issue that pertains to their everyday encounters. This is the case in this discourse as seen in the following turns.

The participants also find it prudent to talk about other issues pertaining to their countries such as Nigeria as well as matters of nationalism. It seems that the two

parties are free to engage each other in discussing almost any issue that either party may be willing to bring on board. In this case, they also relate those issues with their total way of life. In this section, I have discussed issues pertaining to topic initiation, topic development as well as topic termination. I have established that the market discourse is replete with various issues that may not be directly be related to the transaction.

Even as the participants talk about a variety of topics, they still manage to talk topically. In this case, the transaction is made topical through the production of such responses (turns) which are judged by their co-interactant for their quality, quantity and appropriateness. There are occasions when the participants find it imperative to talk about issues of mutual concern but which may not be directly related to the transaction. This underscores the fact that some topics are not directly relevant to the mutual goals of the transaction. In this case, the suitability of such peripheral topics would largely depend on the co-interactant's cooperation. In this paper, I have referred to such issues as being peripheral. The next section deals with such topics.

Peripheral Topics in the Market Negotiation

I have already explained that the market interlocutors are free to talk about diverse issues and that the market encounter does not always constitute a focused activity for the interactants. Various topics of general concern which may not be directly related to the object of the transactional encounter, may inform the market discourse. Either party may initiate or close them or they may just be abandoned along the way as they are meant to remove or reduce boredom. The market interactants may bring up such peripheral topics as they respond to each other's topics and as they just mention something that may not necessarily be related to the transactional encounter at hand. These peripheral topics enable the discourse partners to carry the discussion a step further.

In this turn, the trader has initiated the overall topic of this transaction. He is talking about the worth and value of the goods that he's selling. He is being persuasive in the sense that he is praising and probably exaggerating the quality of the clothes that he is selling. For instance, he talks of many of his shirts and coats matching with almost all other trousers (*Huwa zina-match na nguo nyingi*), but the customer doesn't really take him seriously. When he takes the next turn, he ignores the trader's contribution and thereby, initiates a new topic, which is within the realm of the discourse of bargain. In turn two, the customer asks: *Je, Moody Awori ni Mjalu?* (Is Moody Awori a Luo?). One may ask: what is the relevance of this question in the context of the bargaining activity? In other words, what is the transactional value of this question in relation to the

objectives that inform this bargain? The answer to these questions lies in the wider political context that is in place as the two interlocutors engage each other in the bargain process. I note that when the NARC government took over power and effectively replaced the previous regime (KANU government) in December 31, 2002, Mr. Mwai Kibaki became the president and Mr. Wamalwa Kijana his vice. A few months later i.e. August 2003), Mr. Wamalwa died and was subsequently replaced by Mr. Moody Awori. The two happen to belong to the same linguistic community (Luhya). One characteristic feature that seems to be deeply rooted in the Kenyan political discourse is the linguistic element. If Mr. Wamalwa (the eighth vice president since independence) were to be replaced by one from another community, then this would have created a political tension as the Luhya community would have cried foul that they hadn't been given a fair deal. The two interactants are fully aware of a possibility of such a tension, and as a result, the trader finds it prudent to avoid that topic as soon as possible. The trader, responds to this question in such a casual manner: *Si Mjalu, ni Mluhya* (He is not a Luo, he's a Luhya). The turn that has been cited is a typical example of an utterance that does not seem to be a substantive contribution to the progressivity of this transaction.

The fact that the topic doesn't generate new substantial contributions, means that it is not relevant as at now. From this encounter, it seems that the issue at hand, is not political, but social and transactional and as such, it has nothing to do with Mr. Moody Awori being a Luo or a Luhya. This utterance does not contribute to developing the current topic, and as such, it is closed down interactively. By producing this turn, it seems that the trader is cooperative, and by, abandoning, the topic (about Moody Awori), he seems to suggest that either this topic is potentially complete or is largely in-consequential in light of the dictates of the current discourse. I therefore claim that in the event that either the trader or the customer introduces a topic that has no direct bearing to the discourse at hand, the two parties may choose to collaborate in closing it. This move displays the acceptance of the proposal for closing and collaboration in doing so is in agreement with the prior turn. In the cited example, the trader responds to the customer's question, but continues to produce an utterance that contributes new or relevant information on the topic. I realize that the market interactants are aware of the floor holding rules but they do not prepare the co-interactant for the next topic. In this case, this discourse is a shared activity although the mutual topics are not necessarily signaled. This is because the interactants share enough information for its understanding and interpretation, and as it were, the purpose of the encounter is well known to the interactants. In this way, the trader restores the progressivity of the

topical talk.

In this turn, there is compelling evidence that the trader is not really interested with the topic concerning Moody Awori; instead, she interactively and amicably closes it off just before re-introducing matters related to the previous topic. I therefore claim that conversational interactants are free to introduce completely unrelated matters. The only constraint involved is that they have to get their co-interactants to accept their proposal for initiating and ratifying such topical matters. In other words, such topics that are introduced must be established interactionally and collaboratively. This explains the relevance of the cited turn which may be taken to be an example of an interactional discourse where the topic in progress has not been interactionally closed off. The two participants are still bargaining and as a result, the trader finds it prudent to link her contribution to the prior discourse. The issue concerning: "Moody Awori" seems to be a new mentionable that may not be topicalized. Such topics are dealt with briefly and exhibit degrees of simplicity. The most common features of such topics are in most cases, topic nomination, acceptance and comment by the co-interactant.

From this conversational segment, I realize that there are no specific and distinct discourse markers that can be said to signal the end of an exchange or the initiation of a new topic. When the transition moment reaches, the discourse participants appropriately and amicably revive, change or just initiate a new topic for the conversation. Interlocutors collaboratively manage to introduce and sustain their mutual conversational topics without explicitly making use of such phrases as 'ok', 'any way' as would be the case in other discourse situations (e.g. courtroom discourse). In a competitive bargain such as this, the participants are free to introduce, brush off or even abandon topics at will without necessarily appearing to be rude to each other. I therefore realize that in this discourse, the topics are not fixed beforehand, but are negotiated in the process of interacting, and as evidenced, throughout the transaction process, the next topic of the transaction is developing; each speaker contributes to the transaction in terms of both the existing topic framework and his or her personal topic, a situation that presents such an interesting scenario, in the sense that one would ask: why should the two discourse participants continue bargaining if they are not explicitly cooperative and collaborative? In order to get the entire picture of our argument, I realize that the customer seems to be out-stepping his discursive boundary when he quips: *Can you mention your cost price? I want to make a customer out of you.* He seems to be asking the trader to provide solid evidence in so far as his buying price is concerned.

At this juncture, one may ask: How can solid evidence be constituted? Is the trader under any moral obligation to be truthful when such “truths” may deny her of the returns or profits that could accrue from the transaction? I note that this interaction is neither a fact-finding mission nor an interaction where the participants are expected to present evidence pertaining to the buying and selling prices. Therefore, party has the moral authority to decide who among them is “telling the truth” and who is ‘lying’. Moreover, the two parties are aware of the dictates of the discourse of bargain. The trader’s response doesn’t come as a surprise as it does not really offend his interlocutor but is largely pertinent in explaining the nature of trader-customer Kiswahili discourse. It is largely based on the concept of bargaining, so that each party is expected to use whatever strategies that there may be in ensuring that they get a fair deal from the transaction. In this case, therefore, the segment: “*Can you mention your cost price? I want to make a customer out of you*”, should be interpreted relative to the context: the customer is trying to establish some factual information which may be hard to come-by: cost price of the item. He knows pretty well that in this discourse situation, the main activity that largely occupies the participants is bargaining. As the discourse progresses, each party contributes towards the sustenance of the transaction. I realize that in the market discourse, topics are easily changed and yet this is not felt to be impolite. As the two parties have to interact as equal partners, they find it prudent to change such topics as and when a need arises, for instance, when they have to reduce an amount of boredom that has been accumulated over the transaction period.

This turn doesn’t really excite the trader who is determined to sell his goods irrespective of the lengthy transactional encounter that they are involved in. So as to sustain the conversation, the customer decides to change the topic. In this turn, he says: *Ngoja nikuambie, soko hii ya Gikomba huwa ni ya leo* (Let me tell you the truth, this market remains open only for today). This researcher is aware of the fact that Gikomba open-air market remains open throughout the week: In light of this, then the trader’s contribution may be taken to be a falsity. In the context of the business transaction, it may be safe to interpret this turn as an obvious strategy that the trader uses in order to persuade the customer to buy the item at that particular time, not the following day. But when the customer, casts doubt on the quality of the cloth, the customer retorts thus: *Je, Ina nini? Ni vile tu haijapigwa pasi, customer; kwani hujawahi kununua nguo Gikomba?* (What’s wrong with it? It’s only that it has not been ironed. Could it be that you have never bought cloths at Gikomba?). The customer responds, thus: *Lakini Eldoret wanauza bei rahisi* (But this may be cheaper in Eldoret).

The issue that the customer is raising here may not necessarily be directly relevant to the transactional exchange at hand. I realize that at some point, the two parties are discussing matters that are political in nature: *Je, Moody Awori ni Mjalu?* At yet another point, they go an extra mile to talk about traders in Eldoret. I could assert that the trader is probably trying to provide some evidence which may be hard to verify. It may not be the case that the same item of cloth in Nairobi will cost less in Eldoret. The two parties are not likely to gather enough factual information concerning the cost of the said clothes in Nairobi or Eldoret. The customer knows that his interlocutor will decide either to believe him, or to travel all the way to Eldoret to verify or deny his claims. If he decides to travel to Eldoret purposely to confirm or disconfirm his interlocutor’s claims, then he will be at a loss, as this wouldn’t be a worthwhile venture. It is in this light that the trader, in the following turn says: T: *Wachana na Eldoret hawa watu wanakujanga, kuokota hizo nguo tunauzia bei ya fifty si ninakwambia hata sisi kuna wakati tunauzanga forty bob.* (Just leave them alone. Those traders normally buy rejected cloths from us at a very low price...). Again, the traders’ response coheres with the customer’s contributions to this discourse. The trader knows too well that customers may not really undertake the painstaking exercise of finding out the “truth” from the traders in Eldoret. When the customer says that “clothes are much cheaper” (*Rahisi*) in Eldoret, the trader responds by providing the next turn which strategically gives him (the trader) the impetus and perhaps the only opportunity to ensure that he sustains the transaction. The customer discredits those clothes that are sold in Eldoret as they are only rejects that cannot last long.

In the cited turn, the customer seems to be soliciting background information that may be somewhat relevant for continuity of the current topic and consequently explaining why the trader should consider lowering the price further. I therefore realize that any topic that is introduced to the discourse features prominently from turn to turn in the subsequent discourse, and in any case, whatever utterances that are produced are geared towards the progression of the discourse event. I therefore realize that the trader and the customer introduce, ratify and develop whichever topics that there are and this is achieved by mutual collaborative efforts from both sides. The trader seems to be implying that what she has is of very good quality that may not be comparable at any rate with what other traders may offer. In this turn, the trader takes up again and pursues the same topic as before. The two utterances contribute to the same content, and this brings up coherence as a constitutive feature of topic organization.

It is in this respect that we should view coherence as a mutual and textual phenomenon. In

this case, establishing coherence involves a holistic assessment of the various utterances that are relevant to the context of this interaction. I realize that the two interactants rely heavily on their background knowledge, and this includes their explicit knowledge of places (Eldoret), as well as the bargain activity (where the trader or the customer may not necessarily be truthful in their respective contributions). In this sense, the two parties don't take certain remarks literary. They therefore constantly question each other's assumptions and refuse to take things for granted. In a way, each party seems to attack perceived wisdom and require logical proofs and reasoning in so far as the pricing and worth of the articles of trade is concerned. I realize that in this discourse the trader and the customer are willing to sustain the bargain exchange in such a manner that is so impressive. They establish coherence and understanding, by not introducing brand new topical matters to the transactional exchange, before properly and jointly closing the previous topic. In this way, topics are acceptably and appropriately introduced and fitted into the discourse in such a manner that does not interfere with the coherence of the bargain event.

In view of the topical organization, I realize that the trader and the customer complete one joint project (topic) before engaging in an entirely new one. As the discourse progresses, it becomes evident that the customer will not buy after all, so that when the trader, asks: *Unataka nikuuzie hii?* (Can I sell this one to you?), the customer responds. *Ninaangalia tu* (I am just window shopping). The bargain encounter, seemingly, does not bear much fruit, as neither the trader nor the customer has benefited. The customer's response, points to a situation where he tries to evade topics that may potentially lead to disagreement, and instead decides to be aloof. As the conversation comes to a close, the two interactants seem not to agree and the bargain exercise aborts. In this exchange, the two interactants change the discourse topics without necessarily deviating from the central theme or goal of the transaction. In this utterance, the interactants talk about such issues as their status (salaried), as well as their personal lives, as shown in some of the turns that are extracted hereunder.

From the turns cited above, we come across such peripheral topics that border on salaried employment hard economic times as well as the quality of the second hand clothes which should not be expensive. The peripheral topics that are raised are not directly related to the bargaining event, yet they play a role in mitigating the prize of the article of trade. In light of the turns that are cited above, the two interactants constantly shift turns as long as their goal of exchanging goods has not been achieved. This shows that trader-customer interactions are open-ended so that the participants can explore their social status and relationships and once the task is achieved, the

interactional encounter is collaboratively terminated. The two interactants engage each other in a protracted transactional exchange in which case, they talk about such issues as corruption nationalism and the futility of salaried jobs. As the transaction gains momentum, the interactants engage each other in chit-chat: simple topics touching on the social and daily experiences of the interactants. This is expected, if the interactants are to reduce the amount of boredom as they engage each other in the serious talk. I therefore realize that the market interactants are free to introduce material of almost any kind to the transactional exchange. As such, they would talk about sex, intimacy of the co-interlocutors as well as issues of family life. As the rest of the turns confirm, the market interactants will always find something to talk about. I realize that in the market discourse, topics are readily closed if they have been exhausted by the two parties. Even then, additional topics may be introduced but if it turns out that neither party lays further claim to this opportunity for introducing new topics, then the two parties would consider closing down the transaction. At this point, a complete closure is realized.

From the cited turns above, I identify such peripheral topics as Nigerians being patriotic futility of salaried employment and the deliberate attempt by some Africans to copy foreign lifestyles. The market interactants also find time to talk about a variety of issues. In pragmatic terms, these topics point to one fundamental aspect of the market talk: matters pertaining to general issues are largely seen to be impersonal and safe. In this case, it is quite safe to talk about such topics, even to strangers with whom we cannot share much in common. The safe topics, at least in the market context, are meant to confirm the fact that the interactants are in their real world, and so, they are free to engage each other in the talking about life in general. In this case, the topics which may be raised in the market transactional encounter are not limited. Reference to some aspects of one's personal life is allowed even when the issues talked about may not be directly relevant to the bargain encounter. The market transaction permits the mention of many things and issues regardless of who introduces or ratifies such topics. The participants are thus, not constrained from talking about certain things and there is no requirement about what they should talk about.

I note that the interactants also find time to talk about other people who are thought to be economically endowed (Parliamentarians). This exchange could be understood in the context of the hard economic realities. As such, the common person feels and thinks that it is only the parliamentarian who can afford such expensive commodities because they are endowed economically. To this extent, I conclude that in trader-customer Kiswahili discourse, either party has a right to introduce any

discourse topics which are jointly and dynamically ratified and collaboratively closed down as soon as the mutual goal of exchanging goods is achieved. I also need to mention that in this discourse, the interactants don't work systematically through a transactional topic, yet they are able to talk topically as they engage each other in the transactional encounter. In this case, changing a topic by either party is not resisted as either party has special power, in the sense that the transaction cannot take place in the absence of either. Some topics will temporarily be halted but are not dropped altogether. Such topics may be resumed later. A peripheral topic may be introduced, but since it is not suitable and relevant at the moment, it is not dropped instantly, much as it may not be developed. The data has demonstrated that the transactional partners are free to initiate substantive topics for the transaction through the various turns that are taken by the parties concerned. The topics therefore, link utterances together thematically logically until the transaction is collaboratively terminated.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In this paper, I have given an in-depth analysis of topic initiation, shift and sustenance in trader-customer Kiswahili discourse. The various topics that come on board enable the discourse participants to relate and interact with each other about issues that may be social, economic, political and religious in nature. I have demonstrated that either party is free to initiate a conversational topic and that the two parties willingly cooperate in ratifying and sustaining such topics. This discourse is a serious mutual venture with serious mutual transactional goals that should be reached, yet the interactants initiate topics that are not necessarily transactional in nature. Such topics could touch on the interactants' socio-economic and political lives. This is why I argue that the market interactions permeate and transcend the interactants' total way of life to the extent that neither the trader nor the customer has control over the initiation, development and termination of the discourse topics.

The data demonstrates that this discourse is characterized by randomness of subject matter besides exhibiting a general lack of planning from the interactants. In this case, therefore, it is not easy to predict with precision at the very beginning of any of such encounters, how the transaction will develop and end. Trader-customer Kiswahili discourse is evidently a negotiation that is well-structured in the sense that: a) the interlocutors start the conversation with a greeting sequence that guarantees and anticipates a friendly relationship. b) They make 'unsubstantiated' claims coupled with unmitigated pieces of evidence. They project their desires, goals and intentions onto their interlocutors, amidst overwhelming evidence to

the contrary. c) The interlocutors persuade each other by invoking themes that are meant to ensure that either party should abandon their perspective, to their personal gain.

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