

CLARITY

By Kithaka wa Mberia

Introduction

Communication is the process of transmitting information from the source to the recipient and, more often than not, a movement in the opposite direction, that is, a response from the recipient to the source. When there is such a response, the original recipient becomes the source and the original source becomes the recipient. That is what happens when a conversation takes place or when people exchange letters in the form of paper correspondence or electronic mail. For this process to be successful, the source must send out information that is clear to enable the recipient decipher the meaning. When such clarity is lacking, an attempt at communication becomes an exercise in futility.

Clarity is not only important in interpersonal communication. It is also necessary in other forms of communication including any form of writing. Whether one is writing a school book, scripting a speech, practicing mass communication in the form of writing news articles or broadcasting on television or the radio, or one is advertising goods and services, clarity is of uttermost importance.

In this article, I demonstrate that clarity need not be dependent on luck; there is a method to it. We can achieve it consciously and deliberately. I dedicate the following pages to showing how certain language usages undermine clarity thereby creating impediments to communication and then demonstrate how to circumvent those usages to enable transmission of information clearly.

An Overview of Clarity

A good writer writes in a way that results in a text that is clear to the readers. Such a text enhances communication in that it eliminates or minimizes loss of information being transmitted from the writer (source) to the reader (recipient). In the words of Joseph M. Williams (1990): “The best writing is the one that communicates the intended thought most clearly and in the fewest words possible”. (I will deal with conciseness in another article)

A text that is written in such a way that readers do not comprehend it or do so with difficulties, is said to be obscure. Such texts are undesirable since the purpose of communication is to transmit information from the source of that information to the recipient(s). Therefore anything that interferes with that transmission in the process making communication ineffective is not good for the writer. It turns writing into vanity or near vanity.

Joseph M. Williams (1990) observes that most complexity in writing is more as a result of poor style than the subject matter. Text complexity or obscurity, therefore, can be avoided even when writing on complex issues. In this regard, I recall a book titled *The ABC of Relativity* by Bertrand Russell (). The book is an interpretation of Einstein's theory of relativity; a topic acknowledged as one of the most difficult areas in physics. Despite the complexity of the topic, Russell writes about it in a way that its basics are understandable by a lay person. For instance, I learnt that, whereas it is correct for one to talk of a car traveling at 110 kilometers per hour, it is equally correct to talk of the same phenomenon by saying that the earth is moving under the car at 110 kilometers per hour. The two statements have the same truth value. The reason we talk of the car moving on the road rather than the earth under the car is a matter of perception. The car is much smaller compared to the earth; therefore, we see or *perceive* it moving. Not so the earth.

My approach to clarity is to identify what leads to unclear texts and then demonstrate what we can and should do to achieve clear language.

Some of the main impediments to clarity are:

- 1) Faulty punctuation;
- 2) Abstract words (especially nominalizations);
- 3) Passive sentences;
- 4) Wrong choice of words;
- 5) Ambiguous expressions;
- 6) Lack of coherence in the text;
- 7) Abrupt use of acronyms and abbreviations;

- 8) Vague use vague expression;
- 9) Multiple negations;
- 10) Mismatch between the title and text;
- 11) Wrong positioning of grammatical units;
- 12) Use of unfamiliar expressions; and
- 13) Presence of conflict the information

Having put our fingers on the obstacles to clarity, we should try as much as possible to stay clear of clarity-undermining usages. Accordingly, I recommend as follows:

- 1) Use correct punctuation;
- 2) Avoid nominalizations;
- 3) Avoid passive constructions except when they are necessary;
- 4) Choose words correctly;
- 5) Avoid ambiguous expressions;
- 6) Ensure there is cohesion in the text;
- 7) Avoid abrupt use of acronyms and abbreviations;
- 8) Do not use vague expressions;
- 9) Minimise negations in expressions;
- 10) Ensure there is harmony between the title and text;
- 11) Avoid wrong positioning of grammatical units;
- 12) Use familiar expressions; and
- 13) Ensure there are no conflicts in the information.

Let us, systematically, go through the recommendations that lead to clear language in a text. Each recommendation is intended to prevent occurrence of the impediments to clarity. In other words, the recommendations are geared towards clearing impediments to clarity.

Correct Use of Punctuation

Let us look at two sentences containing the same words arranged in the same order but bearing different meaning due to the presence or absence of commas:

- 1) Kerubo says Naiponei is a very good doctor.
- 2) Kerubo, says Naiponei, is a very good doctor.

In Sentence 1) Kerubo considers Naiponei to be a very good doctor. In other words, in the sentence, Naiponei is the doctor. However, in Sentence 2) Kerubo is the doctor whom Naiponei considers to be very good. Although the two sentences have the same set of words arranged in an identical order, they have different meaning due to different punctuation.

The difference in meaning between members of each of the two sets of sentences above shows the gravity of using punctuation correctly or incorrectly. Incorrect use may result in communicating an unintended meaning.

In the *Daily Nation* of August 6, 2011, there was a center spread article titled “Get and keep your alpha female” At the end of the article was a smaller piece titled “ What the expert says” giving more information regarding the theme of the large feature. The first two paragraphs on the expert’s opinion went thus:

According to relationship counsellor Seth Kamanza, a lot of men seeking meaningful relationships with accomplished women make the mistake of assuming that the alpha mentality defines every aspect of the woman’s life. In reality, though ultra-successful women do not like to admit how much they really earn, or dumb themselves down desperate measure to attract men.

The opinion of the expert does not qualify as a correct English expression. It does not make complete sense. It is incomplete. However, its incomplete nature does not arise from inadequate words. Indeed, it has all the words needed to communicate the intended meaning. Its defect is faulty punctuation. As the expression stands, the word “though” appears to begin a clause after the initial connector (transitional phrase), that is, “in reality”. When the clause starts with

“though”, the complex sentence becomes incomplete. However, if “though”, through appropriate punctuation becomes part of the connector, the first clause of the complex sentence would begin in a manner that makes the sentence grammatical and meaningful. Thus:

In reality though, ultra-successful women do not like to admit how much they really earn, or dumb themselves down desperate measure to attract men.

Let us consider another sentence whereby using or not using commas results in different meanings:

- 1) The participants said the facilitators were brilliant.
- 2) The participants, said the facilitators, were brilliant.

In the Sentence 1, it is facilitators who are brilliant according to the participants. However, in Sentence 2, it is the participants and not the facilitators who are brilliant. We know that fact because it has been stated by the facilitators.

I would like to conclude this section by considering the following two sentences:

- 1) I heard Nasimiyu say, “Let’s eat, Wanjala!”
- 2) I heard Nasimiyu say, Let’s eat Wanjala!”

In sentence 1) the speaker heard Nasimiyu suggesting to somebody called Wanjala that they eat (food). However, in sentence 2), the speaker heard Nasimiyu inviting somebody or some people to join her in eating (that is, feeding on) Wanjala. When we hear sentence 1), we are not bothered because Nasimiyu is just another ordinary being. However, when we hear sentence 2), assuming we have adequate level of competence in the English language, our spines get chilly. Why? Because the sentence reveals to us that Nasimiyu is a cannibal and that Wanjala’s turn to be consumed has arrived! The presence or the absence of the comma before Wanjala makes all the difference. Now, imagine the legal ramifications of the absence of the specific comma in an affidavit that a witness has sworn after Wanjala, who was last seen in Nasimiyu’s home, has gone missing. Add to your imagination that the man or the woman who swore the affidavit has

passed on and, therefore, not available to make any clarification during interrogation in a court of law!

Correct Words

Sometimes a writer fails to communicate the intended message because choosing of a wrong word or wrong words. In other words, because of using the wrong word, the resulting expression ends up giving a different meaning from what was intended. An example of a word that is commonly misused in Kenya is “severally”. One reads in a letter, “This month, I have gone to his office severally”. The word “severally” means “in a group” or “together”. So, the correct interpretation of the sentence is that someone has gone to the office in the company of other people, that is, in a group. Yet, many people use the word “severally” to express “several times”. With the correct choice of words, the sentence that would have carried the correct meaning should have been, “This month, I have gone to his office several times”.

Another frequently misused word is “friend”. Many people have a problem telling the difference between “a friend”, “a colleague”, and “an acquaintance”, “a classmate”, “a schoolmate” and other such nouns. Thus when we read that, “I was in a group of twenty friends with whom I went to have a drink after the examination”, we know the group that went to have a drink did not comprise friends. Mostly likely, the members of the group were merely classmates or colleagues!

Concrete words

There are words that have a broad meaning. Other words, whereas overlapping with the general words, have more specific meaning. Let us take the word “doctor”. A doctor is a professional who is trained to treat diseases. After obtaining the first degree in which doctors acquire broad knowledge on the body, diseases and medicine, they receive specialized training at the postgraduate studies to enable them become experts in specific diseases. Thus, after the initial training and the award of the first degree, doctors may specialize to become, among others, a gynaecologist (a specialist on reproductive issues and unborn children), a paediatrician (a specialist on children and children diseases), dermatologists (an experts on skin complications),

an ophthalmologist (an expert on eyes and eye diseases) or a psychiatrist (a doctor who deals with mental illnesses). A statement such as “Kiambu Level Five Hospital requires an additional doctor” is vague. It does not fully communicate. A more precise and, therefore, more effective communication is to specify the type of the doctor that the Hospital needs. A more concrete and clearer statement would take the form of, “Kiambu Level Five Hospital requires an additional paediatrician”.

Avoiding Ambiguity

An expression, be it a word, a phrase or a sentence, which has more than one meaning is said to be ambiguous. According to Ken Buch:

A word, phrase, or sentence is ambiguous if it has more than one meaning.

The word ‘light’, for example, can mean not only “not very heavy” but also “not very dark”. Words such as, ‘light’, ‘note’, ‘bear’ and ‘over’ are lexically ambiguous.

They induce ambiguity in phrases or sentences in which they occur, such as ‘light suit’, and ‘The duchess can’t bear children’. However, phrases and sentences can be ambiguous even when none of their constituent words is ambiguous. The phrase ‘porcelain egg container’ is structurally ambiguous, as is the sentence ‘The police shot the rioters with guns’.

There are two types of ambiguity, namely, lexical ambiguity and structural ambiguity. Lexical ambiguity arises when a word either functioning alone or in a larger expression has more than one meaning. On the other hand, structural ambiguity is caused the structure of a sentence.

Let us look at an example of an ambiguous sentence:

She rejected his proposal.

The sentence may be interpreted in three ways, that is:

- 1) She rejected his suggestion that they get married;
- 2) She rejected his suggested topic for a dissertation or thesis; or
- 3) She rejected an issue that he suggested, for instance, in a meeting.

Ambiguity in “she rejected his proposal” stems from the ambiguous word “proposal”. Since the word has three meanings, it makes the entire sentence to have an equal number of meanings. In other words, the ambiguous word denies the sentence clarity. To overcome the ambiguity, one has to qualify the word “proposal” as follows:

- 1a) She rejected his marriage proposal;
- 2a) She rejected his research proposal; or
- 3a) She rejected what he proposed in the meeting.

Another example of an ambiguous sentence is the following:

Mary and Jane were walking along the road when she was hit by a car.

The sentence may be understood to contain the information that:

- i) Mary was hit by a car; or that
- ii) Jane was hit by a car.

A third ambiguous sentence comes from V. Fromkin, R. Rodman and N. Hyams (2011). It says:

Flying planes can be dangerous.

They provide two interpretations of the sentence, that is:

- i) While in the air, planes (mode of transport) are dangerous; and
- ii) The occupation of moving planes from one place to another through the skies is dangerous.

A third possible interpretation is that:

iii) The tool used by carpenters, otherwise known as a plane, is dangerous when in the air (for instance, when it has been flung by an angry person to another).

One can also get a fourth meaning by interpreting “a plane” to be a flat and thin piece of material such as metal or wood.

Whereas on the whole, we need to avoid ambiguity, it sometimes becomes handy. In literature, for example, some writers use it to deliberately create multiple interpretations of meaning. Such multiple interpretations give a work of art depth and richness.

Using Single Dialect

Mixing dialects may lead readers to interpret an expression in a way that it was not intended by the writer. Let us take, for example, someone in Kenya using the word “gas” as used in the American transport industry. Such a person, writing a speech for Kenyans, may say:

“Over the last one month, gas has been in short supply in Nairobi”

Whereas the intention of the writer is to comment on the difficulties motorists have been having getting petrol, Kenyan readers will not understand “gas” as a fuel for driving vehicles, but rather as the petroleum product that is contained in cylinders and is used for cooking.

8. Avoiding Multiple Negations

Multiple negations, whether unintended or deliberate, can hinder comprehension of an expression. The following is an example of an unintended double negation which slows down the process of comprehension:

Mr. Ahamadinejad repeated Iran’s frequent denials that the Islamic State is not seeking nuclear weapons.

(Daily Nation, November 8, 20011)

The above sentence means that “Mr. Ahamadnejad did not deny that Iran is seeking nuclear weapons”; in other words, “it is possible that Iran is seeking nuclear weapons”. However, from the context of the newspaper article, Mr. Ahamadinegad unequivocally denied that Iran is seeking nuclear weapons.

We get the meaning not so much from what is said but rather from the common sense after assessing the context of the text. The erroneous message arises from the unintentional use of two negations which cancel each other and lead to a positive rather than a negative interpretation.

Let us look at another example of a multiple negation:

Atieno did not deny not having said that she never eats out on Sundays

This short sentence of only fourteen words is nearly impossible to interpret. It has four negations, namely: “not”, “deny”, “not”, and “never”. What really is the meaning of the sentence especially with regard to whether or not Atieno eats out on Sundays? After comprehend the meaning of the sentence, one arrives at the conclusion that “Atieno never eats out” on Sunday. Moreover, she never denied revealing that fact. She very well may have said as much.

Let us look at yet another example with four negating words:

It’s not true that Njagi did not deny having gone to the supermarket last Friday.

One of the questions we may want to pose with respect to this sentence is the following: What is not true? Answering that question is not easy. Once again, after struggling very hard, one concludes that Njagi, in fact, denied having gone to the supermarket on Friday. In other words, what is not true, is the claim by someone that Njagi did not deny going to the supermarket.

Getting the meaning of the above two sentences is not easy. The effort that one makes to comprehend each of them leaves the mind hazy. And yet they are only two sentences. Supposing one was reading a text whose author is fond of multiple negations. Such a text would be unbearable to read. Its obscurity would make reading it sheer torture.

Making Acronyms and Abbreviations Transparent

It is important for a writer to ensure that what an abbreviation or a new acronym stands for is known by the reader before using it in a text. The best approach to avoid undermining clarity arising from lack of understanding of the abbreviation or a new acronym is to write in full what the abbreviation or the acronym stands for followed by the abbreviation or the acronym in brackets. Once that is done, the abbreviation or the acronym can be used without hindering communication.

In the following article by Joshua Lam, the author shows clearly what the abbreviation stands for before subsequently using the abbreviation on its own. Thus:

The tenth anniversary of the International Criminal Court (ICC) last month was to reflect on the work that the ICC has done, and to look forward to what the ICC will hopefully achieve.

The ICC continues to strive toward its mandate as an international court aimed at ending impunity and bringing justice to victims of international crimes. Despite criticism from some of the political elite in Africa who argue that the ICC “unfairly targets Africans” it is reassuring to know that the ICC actually has a wider approach.

In the foregoing quotation is clear to every reader that ICC stands for the International Criminal Court. The abbreviation is not an impediment to clarity. Not so the following two texts. There are sections in them that are not clear because we not able to decipher the meaning of the abbreviations:

Text 1

Tanzania Deputy Minister for Finance and Economic Affairs Gregory Teu has revealed that the government is yet to receive any funds despite BAE Systems agreeing three months ago to reimburse \$ 29.5 million (\$46.3m) as repayment for the purchase of the obsolete and overpriced Watchman radar system a decade ago.

British MPs on the International Development Committee have been putting pressure on BAE Systems to honour its agreement with the Serious Fraud Office and make a full transfer of reimbursement to the government of Tanzania instead of phased repayments.

Mr. Teu said that the government had expected to receive the money after the agreement but so far the information was that the payment was still in process.

“All I know is that procedures are underway after BAE agreed to pay us back the money, but we don’t know when the funds will reach us”, he said.

BAE Systems had reportedly wanted to spread the repayment over a period of years, describing the payments as “our money.”

“BAE Systems agreed in August [this year] to honour its settlement with the SFO over bribery allegations and make an immediate payment of the reparation, following pressure from the International Development Committee,” the report said...

Text 2

Weather modification technology is being discussed by scientists around the world, but it is strictly still experimental. It raises the suspicion that developed countries, unwilling to pay the big sums of money being discussed at climate change meetings, like the forthcoming COP 17 in South Africa later this year, want to create a diversion by putting on the table an alternative to the reduction of green house gases, which have been agreed at the various COPs, including those at Cancun in Mexico at the end of 2010...

Therefore the much touted Aguiess Project is a mere experiment. If their system works so well for Qataar, or the dry areas of Australia, why not use it to bring rain to the desert before coming to offer the technology to the poor countries of East Africa? The truth is, they want to use our region for experiments, and to offer their results, if successful, to the planned COP in South Africa later this year. Is it not curious that the consortium should come from a major coal exporting country, namely, Australia, and an oil exporting country, namely, Qatar? Why are they requesting the donors to bank roll their experiment? And how do they explain to the donors how at the height of the Monsoon season in South Asia, they are going to “coax the rain clouds” to move in the opposite direction, to the Horn of Africa rather than carry their rain to India and Pakistan?...

The behaviour of weather systems in GHA countries is well understood, thanks to ICPAC and the international weather forecasting centres. We know that the La Nina phase, which brought the intolerable drought, is beginning to wane, and come October (90 days), we may get the beginnings of a recovery. It is, indeed, painful to play with the psychology of regional governments currently trying to respond to the worst drought in 60 years.

10. Cohesion

According to the Collins Concise Dictionary, to cohere is to hold or stick firmly together; to be connected logically; or to be consistent. Therefore, coherence is the logical or natural connection or consistency. Coherence is also referred to as cohesion.

J. Kilborn and N. Kriei (1999) observe that:

Cohesion is the glue that holds a piece of writing together. In other words, if a paper is cohesive, it sticks together from sentence to sentence and from paragraph to paragraph. Cohesive devices certainly include *transitional words and phrases* such as *therefore, furthermore, or for instance*, that clarify for readers the relationship among ideas in a piece of writing. However, transitions aren't enough to

make writing cohesive. Repetition of key words and use of reference words are also needed for cohesion.

11. Correct Sequence of Grammatical Units

When a writer (or a speaker) fails to arrange grammatical units correctly, the result may, at best, be an ambiguous sentence or, at worst, a sentence that is different in meaning from the one that was intended. Let us look at the following sentence spoken in a meeting attended by this writer:

All of us are not accountants.

The sentence means that none of the people in the meeting were accountants. However, that was not the intended meaning. There were accountants in the meeting and the speaker knew as much. Indeed, the comment was made in response to an observation made by an accountant. The speaker wanted to indicate that some people in the meeting, including himself, were not accountants and, therefore, they may not have been in a position to comment competently on the issue at hand. Unfortunately, he got wrong the arrangement of grammatical units resulting in a sentence with a different meaning from the meaning that was intended to convey. He placed the negation “not” in the wrong position. The correct arrangement of grammatical units for his intended meaning should have been:

Not all of us are accountants.

Let us look at another example of wrong ordering of grammatical units which lead to unintended meaning. The error was in a caption appearing under the picture of the late Joseph Tom Mboya. It read:

Tom Mboya: A possible contender for the presidency on July 5, 1969 was gunned down on Moi Avenue Nairobi (DN. March 2, 2012)

The sentence erroneously states that Tom Mboya was a possible contender for presidency on July 5, 1969. In other words, we are made to think that there were presidential elections on July

5, 1969. As a matter of fact, there were not any presidential elections on that date. Tom Mboya was a possible presidential candidate for elections that were held in December 1969. Due to the wrong placement of the adverb of time regarding Tom Mboya's gunning down, the writer ended up saying something that was not intended. The adverbial unit, that is "on July 5, 1969", was intended to qualify the phrasal verb "gunning down" and not "contending" presidency. Unfortunately, the adverbial phrase was placed immediately after "a possible contender for presidency" giving the wrong impression that the date for the presidential contest was on the mentioned date.

The writer would have avoided creating the misleading impression by placing the adverbial phrase after the phrasal verb "gunning down" Thus:

2b) Tom Mboya: A possible contender for the presidency was gunned down on July 5, 1969 on Moi Avenue, Nairobi

Let us look at another example of a caption which, once again, gave the wrong impression of the factions of the caption. The picture caption read:

A nurse attends to a 17-year-old boy who was attacked by a shark at the Coast General Hospital yesterday

This caption is at best ambiguous and at worst misleading. The meaning of the caption that immediately comes to mind is that a nurse is attending to a boy who had been attacked by a shark and that the location of the attack was Coast general hospital. What the caption does not tell is where the boy was being attended to by a nurse. According to the caption we do not know the time when the nurse attended to the young man because the adverb of time, that is, "yesterday" indicates the time of the attack and not the time that the nurse attended to the boy. Yet, with certainty, the information that the writer intended to convey is that, "yesterday", a nurse at the Coast general hospital, was attending to a boy who had been attacked "somewhere" by a shark. The writer, probably, does not know when the shark attacked the boy, or he/she has that information, it is not given to the reader.

The writer of the caption impeded clarity thereby undermining communication by wrongly arranging grammatical units. There are a number of ways of modifying the caption so as to convey clearly the meaning intended by the writer. One option is:

A nurse, at the Coast General Hospital yesterday, attends to a 17-year-old boy who had been attacked by a shark.

I have one more example to demonstrate how the wrong arrangement of grammatical units can be an obstacle to clarity. The sentence below was a caption in one of the Kenyan dailies beneath a picture of a senior officer of the Kenya Administration Police who being pulled from Administrative Police Training College to ceremoniously mark his retirement from the disciplined forces. The caption read:

Atop an open Land Rover, senior officers used ropes to cart Mr. Mbugua out of the AP Training College in Embakasi, Nairobi

“Atop an open Land Rover” is placed in the wrong position in the sentence. As a consequence, the sentence claims, wrongly, that the senior officers were atop an open Land Rover as they carted Mr. Mbugua out of the Administrative Police Training Camp. Nothing could be further than the truth; it was Mr. Mbugua who was atop the open Land Rover and not his colleagues. “Atop an open Land Rover” should be placed in such a position as to qualify Mr. Mbugua rather than the “senior officers”. The right position is immediately after Mr Mbugua so the that the sentence reads:

Senior officers used ropes to cart Mr. Mbugua, atop a Land Rover, out of the Ap Training College in Embakasi Nairobi.

12. Familiar Words and Phrases

One of the ten principles of **clarity** by Robert Gunning (1968), states that: “Prefer the simple to the complex”. Some people assume complex expressions to be a mark of good command of

language or even a symbol of sophistication. However, quite often, complex or unfamiliar expressions do more harm than good; they blur clarity and impede communication.

Let us look at a sentence with some unfamiliar words:

- a) After the rigmarole of the recruitment of the new ambassadors, the President had a tete-a-tete with the Prime Minister only for another hullabaloo to start barely two days later.

The words “rigmarole”, “tete-a-tete” and “hullabaloo” are not common. As a result, some people may be unable to comprehend the meaning of the sentence. The unfamiliar words have nothing of value to contribute to the sentence. On the contrary, they blur clarity and undermine communication. What the writer wants to communicate can be said in a clear language such as:

After the long and complicated recruitment of the new ambassadors, the President had a one on one meeting with the Prime Minister only for another confusion to start barely two days later.

The sentence below has unfamiliar expressions of non-English origin. Just like the unfamiliar words in the above sentence, they too interfere with clarity and undermine comprehension. The sentence reads:

Our raison d’etre as a seat of higher learning is to satiate young Kenyans of their hunger for knowledge and our modus operandi is, inter alia, lectures, assignments and examinations.

“Raison d’etre” is borrowed into English from French. “Modus operandi”, “satisfy” and “inter alia” all have their origin in Latin. The sentence containing the four unfamiliar expressions can be rendered in a less pompous and more understandable form as shown below:

Our mission as a seat of higher learning is to satisfy young Kenyans’ hunger for knowledge through, among other methods, lectures, assignments and examinations.

It is important to specifically caution against the use of jargon. Longman's *Dictionary of temporary English* describes jargon as "difficult or strange language which uses words known only to members of a certain group". Examples of jargon include the specialised language of the professions, academic disciplines, trades and occupations. Professionals such as lawyers, engineers, doctors, accounts and geologists use jargon in their respective areas of expertise. So do linguists, biochemists physiologists and literary scholars. Likewise, golfers, cricketers and divers use unique language in their respective sports.

If a phonologist (that is, a language scientist who studies the organization and behavior of the sounds of human language) states that:

"Kikamba has lost most of its lateral liquids as well as the voiced velar consonants leading to vowel clusters in many of its words".

or

"The two mid-high vowels in Kitharaka, which happen to be tense, undergo both vowel heightening and vowel gliding"

will be clearly understood by other phonologists irrespective of their country of origin. However, the statements do not make sense to a non-linguist Kenyan, not even to a speaker of Kikamba or Kitharaka respectively. The statements have a lot of jargon. It would be absurd, therefore, for a linguist to use expressions such "lateral liquids", "voiced velar consonants", "mid-high vowels", "vowel heightening" or "vowel gliding" when writing an email to or talking with a non-linguist. The terms belong to the confines of linguistics lecture theatres, linguistics conferences and linguistics journals.

13. Conclusion

Clarity is one of the most important aspects of effective communication. Whether one is considering written or spoken communication, the primary goal of a communicator is to transmit information. Effective communication is one in which all the intended information reaches the

recipient. For such an eventuality, there must be maximum clarity. In this article, I have taken the reader through what I consider to be the major impediments to clarity and showed how to circumvent them. Whereas the article does not purport to be a guide on the elimination of all obstacles to clarity, it does provide a basis for the understanding of common obstacles to clarity and strategies to enable one communicate in a clear way.

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