

## MECHANISMS INVOLVED IN BORROWING IGIKURIA WORDS INTO DHOLUO: A CASE OF IGIKURIA AND DHOLUO CONTACT

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### Abstract

*Dholuo speakers interacting with Igikuria speakers at the border appear to use two sets of lexical items that semantically refer to the same phenomenon, whereas Dholuo speakers living far away from Igikuria speakers have single lexical items and are constantly struggling to become mutually comprehensible. This has sparked debate regarding their origin and semantics. The study therefore sought to determine the mechanisms involved in borrowing Igikuria words into Dholuo. The theoretical framework of Cognitive Lexical Semantic Approach propounded by Lakoff (1987) and revised by Lakoff and Johnson (2003) was used to classify, analyze, discuss, and draw conclusions from the data obtained. The study employed a descriptive research design, as the data was primarily qualitative. A sample size of 78 participants was finally achieved upon saturation. 49 of whom were Dholuo speakers and 29 Igikuria speakers. A participatory observation method of data collection was used to gather data from a variety of verbal contact situations such as public places and preplanned interviews. The findings were that, linguistic contact and language conflict accounted for more word borrowing followed by bilingualism and finally loan shift accounted for the least number of words borrowed. However, direct loans, loan translation, loan creation, clipping and coinage did not account for any borrowing. The study provides insights to the language, literature and linguistic educators into understanding mechanisms involved in lexical borrowing and semantic change along Kuria- Luo boarder.*

**Keywords:** Mechanisms, Lexical Borrowing, Semantic Change, bi-lingualism, linguistic contact, language conflicts, loan shift, direct loans, loan creation, loan translation, clipping, coinage.

### Introduction

Language contact and mixing are common in 21st-century societies, where speakers of African indigenous languages interact with diverse communication repertoires. Global contact phenomena, such as the influence of English on other native languages, regional languages, and contacts within language families, can lead to language death or development. Language contact is not homogeneous and can occur across genetically related or distinct languages. Social structures, such as language acquisition, processing,

and production, are influenced by these interactions. Ariyae (2019) highlights the importance of domain in linguistic diversity. Borrowing, the act of adopting words from a source language into one's dialect, is a process involving adaptation and transmission (Riro, 2020). Lexical items, such as phonemes, phonological rules, sounds, and discourse markers, can be borrowed into a target language when speakers interact. Cronhamn (2018) adds that lexical borrowing is typically caused by cultural variables, including socio-cultural, socio-economic, and psychological factors.

Nordquist (2021) on the other hand observes that lexical borrowings of a foreign origin not only allow the adoption of advanced conceptual meanings but also establish broader and numerous association links due to distinct conceptual representations. Similarities between geographically close languages are therefore not incidental but attest to a shared past among its speakers. Either the speakers might have originated from a common ancestor and similar features were passed down through the generations, or they are, or were, in mutual contact and borrowed features from one another over time,” (Nordquist, 2021). The focus of this study was mechanisms involved in borrowing Igikuria into Dholuo.

Dholuo speakers in Migori are in continuous contact with other native languages, particularly, Igikuria owing their proximity and shared borders. When these native languages come into contact due to social, economic or political reasons, they transfer linguistic features from one language to the other resulting into loanwords that are not mutually intelligible by other native Dholuo speakers of Kisumu South Nyanza (KSN) dialect living far away from Igikuria speakers. Dholuo spoken in Migori therefore, becomes central to this study since it has loanwords that are not mutually intelligible by other native Dholuo speakers of the Kisumu South Nyanza dialect (KSN) dialect living far away from Igikuria speakers. More interestingly, Dholuo speakers interacting with the Igikuria speakers appear to use two sets of lexical items that semantically refer to the same phenomenon, whereas Dholuo speakers living far away from the Igikuria speakers have single lexical items and are constantly struggling to become mutually intelligible. This brings about confusion and misinterpretation. The influx of vocabularies originating from Igikuria into Dholuo lexical structure, sparks debate regarding their meanings and origins. It is in light of this that the study not only intended to examine the mechanisms involved in borrowing Igikuria words into Dholuo,

but also its potential contribution to understanding the language used along Kuria-Luo border.

### Research Methodology

This study utilized a case study research design with a qualitative approach. A case study is a detailed study of a specific subject, such as a person, group, place, event, organization, or phenomenon (Karunaratna *et.al* 2024) and commonly used in social, educational, clinical, and business research. Case study research design not only anticipates and specifies numerous decisions related to data collection, processing, and analysis, but also provides a logical justification for these decisions, (McCombes, 2023). Moreover, a case study research design usually involves qualitative methods, but quantitative methods are sometimes used as well. Case studies are good for describing, comparing, evaluating and understanding different aspects of a research problem, (Cherry, 2022). This design was set to examine the extent of lexical borrowing of loanwords from Igikuria into Dholuo. Pangaribuan & Sipayung (2019,) observes that a descriptive technique determines and reports the way things are, while also assisting in the generation of hypotheses rather than testing them.

The study targeted any Dholuo speaking and Igikuria speaking individuals in Migori County along Dholuo-Kuria borders who were in apposition to give information on lexical borrowing and semantic change. A sample size of 78 participants was finally achieved upon saturation.49 of whom were Dholuo speakers and 29 Igikuria speakers’ .Fusch (2015) observes that data saturation is reached when there is enough information to replicate the study when the ability to obtain additional new information has been attained, and when further coding is no longer feasible. On the same note, the study employed a multiple-stage sampling technique. Bhandari (2023) defines multistage sampling as a sampling technique where a researcher draws a sample from a population using smaller and smaller groups

(units) at each stage. To begin with, the researcher selected Igikuria and Dholuo speakers using the purposive sampling method. This is because purposive sampling takes into account the researcher's judgment as to who can supply the greatest information to fulfill the study's desired outcomes. As a result, the researcher made contact with people he believed are relevant, to a point of saturation. Tight (2023) equally adds that saturation occurs when collection and/or analysis of additional data adds nothing new to a piece of research.

Secondly, the sample size of the key respondents who are Dholuo speakers in Migori were derived through snowballing method. This stems from the fact that in qualitative, the number of respondents or sample size is not decided in advance (Tight, 2023). A few individuals in a group are thus selected and the relevant data is collected. The individuals then identified other members who became part of the sample until a point of saturation is reached (Hennink & Kaiser 2022). The researcher then sampled speakers of both Igikuria and Dholuo irrespective of their ages. This is in agreement with Thomas (2022), who posits that purposive selection is the method of selecting a number of groups of units in such a way that selected group's together yield as nearly as possible the same average proportion as the totality in terms of those characteristics that are already a matter of statistical knowledge. A sample size of 78 participants was arrived at.

The data collection tools utilized in this research consisted of semi-structured interview guide. The tool was adequate for gathering exhaustive and extensive primary data, addressing the objective of the study since it allowed the respondents ample time to reflect on answers by avoiding hasty responses thus enhancing validity (Pangaribuan & Sipayung, 2019). In order to create an interview schedule that aligns with the study objective, the researcher worked with an expert from the department of Language, literature and linguistics in Rongo University to produce interview guide

questions. The researcher developed and rephrased the questions after this process. The expert from the department then reviewed the interview schedule questions. Following the pilot procedure, the researcher distributed the questions to department experts for a second review before utilizing them to gather field data. Question items were rewarded based on the pilot study's results. Obscure and unclear questions were changed. Those that are non-functional and ineffective were discarded.

Secondly, the study also relied on participatory observation. Hammer *et al.* (2017) observed that participant observation parallels the principles of Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR), recognizing that each group (community) should be understood in its own context. This created a marginal position of simultaneously being an insider and an outsider within the chosen socio-cultural group under study. The researcher got involved in verbal interactions with informants in church gatherings, markets centers in Migori town and hotels among others. The researcher listened keenly as he made written recordings of words perceived to be of Igikuria origin. It is at this point that the researcher's intuition and linguistic competence in Dholuo as a native speaker of the same became of great importance.

The researcher conducted physical visits to the study area. All participants were given consent forms before proceeding. Data collected undoubtedly comprised of an inventory of loanwords from Igikuria but in common everyday use among the native speakers of Dholuo. The researcher collected a fair number of lexical items claiming their origin in Igikuria from various semantic domains. Most verbal interactions among the Igikuria and Dholuo were captured in Migori town, Masaba, Mabera, Nyanchabo, kombe, maramu and Kurutiyange. They therefore became a target area for effective informants. Rai & Thapa (2015) denotes that in purposive sampling, "the focus is on particular characteristics of a population that are of interest and will best enable a researcher answer his

or her research questions. The researcher was able to collect data from conversations from everyday conversations such as parties, markets, funerals and from preplanned interview sessions with carefully selected or sampled informants in Migori town.

Data was analyzed thematically. Once the narrations from respondents were recorded, themes were generated as in (Braun and Clerke, 2016)

**Table 1**

*Mechanisms Involved in Borrowing Igikuria Words into Dholuo*

Mechanism of Word Borrowing	Number of Words Borrowed	Percentage
Linguistic Contact	11	36.0%
Language Conflict	11	36.0%
Loan Shift	2	6.7%
Bilingualism	6	19.9%
Loan Translation	0	0.0%
Loan Creation	0	0.0%
Loan Clipping	0	0.0%
Direct Loans	0	0.0%

***Linguistic Contact***

Table 1 shows that the most effective mechanisms of word borrowing from Igikuria into Dholuo is through linguistic contact at (36.0%). As the two languages interact, their features get into contact and thus undergo modifications resulting into

**Table 2:**

*Igikuria Words Borrowed into Dholuo through Linguistic Contact*

Igikuria Words	Gloss	Dholuo	Gloss	Loanword	Gloss
orobao	wood	bao	wood	obao	wood
ekebakuli	bowl	bakul	bowl	ebakuli	bowl
omosara	salary	osara	salary	mosara	salary
kinyi	private hair	okinyi	morning	kinyi	morning
abanto	crowd	bando	maize	banto	crowd
etero	maasai sandals	itero	inherit	itero	sandals
egetonga	tray	atonga	tray	egonga	tray
Iriyembe	mango	yembe	wind	elembe	mango
iriko	stone cooking fire	riko	insert	iriko	inserting
irisaro	clouds	saro	cut	risao	clouds
igichiko	spoon	ojiko	spoon	riko	spoon

In Table 2, a closer study of the lexical loanwords reveals certain patterns that can phonologically be

**Results and Discussions**

In determining the mechanisms involved in borrowing Igikuria words into Dholuo, the following mechanisms were investigated; linguistic contact, language conflict, loan shift, bilingualism, loan translation, loan creation, loan clipping and coinage, Direct loans. Table 1 shows the details of words borrowed through the mechanisms.

Igikuria words being borrowed into Dholuo. The results corroborate Adham (2022), who contends that the most effective method of borrowing is direct borrowing from another language, stemming from interactions with the populace of a different nation or their languages.

explained. Key modification processes that emerge as a result of linguistic contact between Igikuria and

Dholuo are; deletion, addition, substitution, and assimilation. The accommodation of the loanword within the Dholuo lexical framework facilitates a broader understanding of the nature of meaning(s) in a language resulting from the contact between Igikuria and Dholuo, as highlighted by the Cognitive Lexical Semantic Theory. It is important to note that Igikuria lexical items are typically preceded with a vowel, whereas Dholuo lexical items may begin with either a vowel or a consonant. In order to maintain harmony between these two distinct languages, a vowel is used before a loanword. The characteristics of articulation, both in manner and place, significantly played a pivotal role in determining the direction of lexical borrowing. In the case of *Abanto* (crowd), the researcher establishes that the voiceless alveolar stop /t/ in Igikuria, assimilates the voiced alveolar plosive /d/ in the Dholuo word *Bando*'(maize) leading to the new vocabulary *banto* (crowd). In a similar vein, Dholuo speakers residing at the border have also embraced a specific way of pronouncing the final vowel /o/ in the word *banto*. Conversely, speakers of the KSN dialect articulates the ending vowel /o/ in the word *bando* as a mid-low back sound, whereas the Igikuria speakers articulates it as a mid-back vowel. In contrast, Dholuo speakers at the border articulate it as a mid-back vowel. It can therefore be deduced that the contrastive linguistic features mentioned above, claims linguistic origin from the Igikuria language. Similarly, the initial voiced velar fricative /ɣ/ in the Igikuria word *Egetonga* assimilates the voiceless alveolar plosive /t/ in the Dholuo word *Atonga*, leading to the formation of a new vocabulary along Luo-Kuria border, 'Egonga'. It can be observed that the Dholuo language lacks the consonant sound /ɣ/ within its consonant inventory. This particular consonant sound is exclusively present in Bantu languages. Among these, Igikuria, which is classified as a Bantu language, contributed the consonant sound /ɣ/ to the consonant inventory of Dholuo.

In the word *etero* in Igikuria, the initial front mid low vowel /e/ has been substituted by a front mid

high vowel /i/ in the Dholuo lexical word *itero*. Similarly, Luo speakers of the KSN dialect pronounce the ending vowel /o/ in *itero* as a high back sound, while Dholuo speakers at the border articulate it as a mid-low back vowel just like the Igikuria speakers, which denotes *akala*, a traditional African sandal favored by the Maasai. It can therefore be presumed that Dholuo speakers at the border have not only borrowed the articulatory features from Igikuria, but also the semantics. This further escalates misinformation among other Dholuo speakers of KSN dialect.

Mackenzie (2017) raises concerns about the increasing number of non-native English speakers (L2) compared to native speakers (L1). Similarly, the enhanced interaction between Dholuo and Igikuria, driven by bilingualism and multilingualism, may also lead to the loanword becoming more dominant along their shared borders. This can be attributed to the fact that 'the younger generation' of 18years and below and majority are students and pupils accounted for the majority of speakers of these loanwords. The application of cognitive lexical semantics theory propounded by Lakoff (1987) and revised by Lakoff and Johnson (2003), therefore allowed the researcher to examine these lexical items and their characteristics in relation to cognitive domains (functions). This approach was therefore essential, as language is viewed as an integral part of cognitive processes rather than an isolated phenomenon (Li, 2024). Consequently, the researcher was able to analyze the changes resulting from the contact between Igikuria and Dholuo.

### **Language Conflict**

Language Conflict is another effective mechanism involved in borrowing Igikuria words into Dholuo at 36.0%. Nelde (2017), observes that language conflict occurs when two or more language communities interact closely, but their languages have unequal status or competing social, political or cultural interests. Instead of a peaceful bilingualism between Dholuo and Igikuria, the contact has led to



tension, leading to the emergence of loanwords to accommodate the two languages. Demska (2018) confirms that the strongest example of the conflict in the language comprises the lexical and

grammatical transformations. 11 words were borrowed from Igikuria into Dholuo. The words were all nouns and they are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3:**

*Words Borrowed from Igikuria into Dholuo through language conflict*

Igikuria words	Gloss	Dholuo	Gloss	loanword	Gloss
isukuri	school	sikul	school	sikuri	school
iriyembe	mango	yembe	winds	lembe	mango
irigutu	tent	ogudu	cap	rigutu	tent
egetonga	tray	atonga	basket tray	agonga	tray
umuya	road	muya	air	buya	road
esogisi	socks	soksi	socks	sogisi	socks
inchira	light	chira	taboo	nchira	light
itara	lamp	taya	light	ntara	lamp
irikendo	papyrus reed	kendo	fireplace	rikendo	papyrus reed
muchere	rice	muchele	rice	muchere	rice
ichooka	axe	ijooga	annoying	ichoka	axe

The findings in Table 3 shows that Dholuo, due to its close proximity with Igikuria, has also borrowed certain lexical and grammatical characteristics from Igikuria. This has resulted to the creation of new vocabularies within the Luo-Kuria border. The findings align with Demska (2018) assertion that the most prominent manifestation of conflict within language involves both lexical and grammatical changes. As the two languages interact, their linguistic features modify one another leading to the formation of new lexical sets. The Cognitive lexical Semantic Theory therefore becomes vital in understanding how these new lexical sets are conveyed, learnt and stored. Darquennes (2015) observed that these new vocabularies may arise due to differences in prestige, status, power, social organization, values and beliefs as they exist between a speech community A and a speech community B. Conflict arising between Dholuo and Igikuria has correspondingly occurred due to prestige, status, power and social organization. One of the respondents observed that they use the loanwords for prestige and social organization. The new vocabulary may therefore retain its original meanings or undergo semantic alterations. This in

turn leads to semantic overlap among other speakers of KSN dialect, who live far away from the borders. For example, the word *Irikendo* in Igikuria, which denotes a papyrus reed used for mat-making, has undergone a lexical modification, losing the initial mid-high front vowel /i/ to conform to Dholuo phonemic structure. Similarly, the words *Irigutu* meaning tent in Igikuria, and *Ogudu*, which signifies a cap in Dholuo, have contributed to the formation of the term *Rigutu*. In the case of *esogisi* from Igikuria and *Soksi* in Dholuo, while the lexical structure remains intact, the articulation has been borrowed and adapted. The voiced velar stop /k/ in *Soksi*, meaning socks, has been assimilated by the voiced velar fricative /ɣ/ found in the Igikuria term *Esogisi*. The diminishing opportunities or motivations for Dholuo speakers to engage with their native language therefore, can potentially lead to language endangerment or loss, Mufwene (2020). Despite the borrowing and adaptation of Igikuria terms by Dholuo speakers along the borders, their heritage language remains integral.

### ***Bilingualism***

Bilingualism is another mechanism through which 6 (19.9%) of Igikuria nouns were borrowed into Dholuo. All the words were nouns. In contrary, Mackenzie (2017) raises questions about the increasing number of non-native English speakers (L2) compared to native speakers (L1). Similarly, the enhanced interaction between Dholuo and Igikuria, driven by bilingualism and multilingualism, may also lead to the loanword becoming more dominant along their shared border. This can be attributed to the fact that the "younger" generation of 18years

and below are students and accounted for the majority of speakers of these loanwords. The application of cognitive lexical semantics theory allowed the researcher to examine these lexical items and their characteristics in relation to cognitive domains (functions). This approach was essential, as language is viewed as an integral part of cognitive processes rather than an isolated phenomenon (Ellis, 2019). Consequently, the researcher was able to analyze the changes resulting from the contact between Igikuria and Dholuo.

**Table 4:**

*Dholuo Words Borrowed from Igikuria through Bilingualism Mechanism*

Igikuria	Gloss	Dholuo	Gloss	Loanword	Gloss
emesa	table	mesa	table	chimesa	table
isukuri	school	sikul	school	Sikuri	school
umuchere	rice	muchehe	rice	muchere	rice
kibiriti	matchbox	kibrit	matchbox	ibiriti	matchbox
ichivesa	money	pesa	money	chipesa	money
egekombe	cup	okombe	cup	ekombe	cup

The data presented in Table 4.4 supports the argument made by Perkins & Zhang (2024) that, while the majority of transfer studies have concentrated on the impact of first language (L1) on second language (L2), more recent research indicates that L2 can also have an impact on another L2. The study reveals that Dholuo non-native speakers use features from a second language they know, particularly English and Kiswahili, to influence their use of another second language. The Cognitive Lexical Semantics Theory propounded by Lakoff (1987) and revised by Lakoff and Johnson (2003), guided in understanding the derived lexical sets and their meanings resulting from lexical contacts between Dholuo and Igikuria.

The findings reveal that Dholuo L2 can equally interact with Igikuria L2 and together have a cohesive L3 along Luo-Kuria borders. Furthermore, these two L2s (Dholuo L2 and Igikuria L2) share a common set of borrowing languages, specifically English and Kiswahili. In the case of *Ichivesa*, Igikuria word meaning money and *Pesa*, Dholuo

word meaning money, originally the two words originated from a Kiswahili word *pesa* meaning money. Due to the interaction between the Dholuo L2 and Igikuria L2 words, a new cohesive L3 at the border, *Chivesa*, has emerged to equally represent money. Schroeder (2008) observes that one of the General Unified Spelling Rules for Bantu languages is that loanwords should be transcribed according to their pronunciation in local languages. In the Igikuria term *Ichivesa*, the vowel sound /i/ is not stressed; rather, the emphasis is placed on the palatal-alveolar affricate /tʃ/. This guided in understanding the direction of borrowing. In addition to providing distinct insights into bilingual cognitive architecture by exposing the manner in which languages interact during bilingual production, transfer and borrowing are not necessarily associated with competency. The Cognitive Lexical Semantics theory propounded by Lakoff (1987) and revised by Lakoff and Johnson (2003), was therefore instrumental in understanding the semantics of these new words, how they are learnt and stored. Cross-linguistic

interactions therefore, stem from variations in the bilinguals language setting (Perkins & Zhang, 2024). Particularly, the language spoken during the conversation, also referred to as "the interviewing language," and the variations in the two languages' structures (Igikuria and Dholuo). Semantic and syntactic characteristics can differ between Dholuo and Igikuria. This in turn affects how the bilingual lexicon is structured. This is evident when L1 structures are employed during L2 production due to calcified representations obtained through the L1 (Romano, 2021) or when L2 structures are used during L1 production following acquisition of L2 (Romano, 2021).

The researcher identified that both Igikuria and Dholuo equally feature loanwords that trace their origins to the same donor language, Kiswahili and English. These loanwords interact in comparable ways, thereby influencing the linguistic structure of the recipient language, particularly the bilingual lexicon, and resulting in orthographic or semantic overlaps. This finding aligns with Grosjean's (2024) perspective that bilinguals, when communicating with fellow bilinguals, may blend their languages through code-switching or borrowing. Dholuo has particularly borrowed and incorporated some L2 characteristics from Igikuria.

### **Loan Shift**

Loan Shift is another mechanism through which Igikuria lexical characteristics are borrowed into Dholuo lexical structure. In this study only 2 Igikuria out of 30 were found to have been borrowed into Dholuo (6.7%). Mufwene, 2020) notes that a language shift is a social phenomenon whereby one language replaces another in a given (continuing) society. That is, a type of language borrowing where a word in a language takes on a new meaning due to the influence from a corresponding word in another language or underlying changes in the composition and aspirations of the society—without borrowing the foreign word itself. Two nouns were observed to

have undergone language shift due to the contact between Dholuo and Igikuria. *Ichumbe* semantically borrowed into *chumbe*. The meaning of the Igikuria lexical word *Ichumbe* has been borrowed and adopted into Dholuo word *chumbe*. Moreover, the Igikuria meaning of the word *Motera* has also been adopted by the Luo community along the borders. The lexical semantic of the Igikuria word has been borrowed into the Luo word, *motena*. This brings about semantic overlap among other speakers of KSN dialect who are far from the borders. Mufwene (2020) similarly defines Language Shift (LS) as a phenomenon resulting from diminishing opportunities or incentives for speakers to engage with their native language, which may lead to language endangerment or loss. While the borrowed terms largely preserve their original forms and meanings, some exhibit slight variations (Arokoyo, 2020). Dholuo speakers, even though acquired new meanings from Igikuria, have still preserved their word forms. Other processes, including loan translation, loan creation, clipping, coinage, and direct loans, constituted 0.0% of the vocabulary.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The mechanisms through which Igikuria words are borrowed into Dholuo encompass linguistic contact, language conflict, loan shift, and bilingualism. Notably, linguistic contact and language conflicts significantly contribute to the increased borrowing of Igikuria words into Dholuo. Additionally, bilingualism serves as another avenue for the borrowing of Igikuria terms. Conversely, other mechanisms such as direct loans, loan translation, loan creation, clipping, and coinage accounted for a negligible 0.0% of the borrowed words.

Language contact, which is marked by its diversity, can occur between languages that are either genetically related or completely distinct. Consequently, it is essential to explore the



mechanisms that facilitate the borrowing of Dholuo lexical items into the Igikuria lexicon.

### **Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process**

The author(s) employed AI technology during the preparation of this work for the purposes of spell checking, enhancing cohesion, ensuring coherence, and refining grammar. Following the utilization of this AI tool, the author(s) meticulously reviewed and modified the content as needed, thereby accepting full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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Juma Elisha: Conceptualization, writing and editing the Original draft, Dr. Gechemba Nyakoe: Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization and Dr. Omondi Odero: Writing – review & editing.

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The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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