

SEMANTIC CHANGES IN BORROWED CORE VOCABULARY AND FREQUENTLY-USED WORDS BETWEEN DHOLUO AND EKEGUSII

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Abstract

This study focuses on the borrowing of core vocabulary items and frequently used words between Dholuo and Ekegusii. The two languages are phylogenetically different. There are a number of similar core vocabulary items between the two languages. The similarity can only be explained in ways other than genetic relationship. Core vocabulary are words which belong to the domains that resist borrowing. They are words which refer to objects that accompany human beings independently of their specific environment. Frequently used words are stable and unlikely to slip into disuse leading to possible replacement through borrowing. The study is guided by the following objectives: to examine if core vocabulary are borrowable, to explain which speech community borrowed from the other, to establish whether the borrowed words retain their meanings in the recipient language. The research used two data collection tools: a questionnaire and an unstructured interview. The unstructured interview targeted a different set of respondents. The purpose was to get a deeper understanding of some language phenomena which the questionnaire could not elicit such as the etymology of the words. A comparative analysis of the lexical items generated by the questionnaire was done using different parameters. The study used the Theory of Linguistic Interference. This Theory considers borrowing as interference with the recipient language because of introduction of foreign linguistic features, the sociolinguistic history of the speakers, direction and extent of borrowing. The findings proved the following: the similar lexical items were borrowed, Ekegusii borrowed the words from Dholuo, some of the words acquired new nuances of meaning in the recipient language. However, the key finding of the study is that contrary to what is in the literature, core vocabulary and frequently used words are borrowable. The finding is critical in accommodating a fresh sociolinguistic thought that all words, regardless of the domains, are susceptible to borrowing.

Keywords: *core vocabulary, frequently-used words, phylogenetic distance, semantic change, direction of borrowing*

Introduction

This research work is about two languages; Dholuo and Ekegusii. The Luo speakers occupy Siaya, Kisumu, Homa-Bay and Migori counties. The Ekegusii speakers occupy Kisii and Nyamira counties. The two speech communities - which are

not genetically related - are contiguous with each other and with that contiguity, lexical borrowing becomes a common phenomenon due to social interaction.

Dholuo and Ekegusii share similar lexical items which fall within the ambit of 'core vocabulary' and

'frequently-used' words. Linguists are invariably in agreement that core vocabulary items are more resistant to borrowing than the less basic vocabulary. Hock & Joseph (1996), state that 'the most successful resistance is offered by basic vocabulary'. 'Basic vocabulary' and 'core vocabulary' and terms which are used interchangeably by linguists to refer to the same concept. Wohlgemuth (2009), addresses the 'non-borrowability of core vocabulary'. Matras (2009), indicates that 'there is a core vocabulary that is...resistant to borrowing'. Crowley (2010), asserts that 'the lexicon that is assumed to be more resistant to lexical change is core vocabulary'. Dimmendaal (2011), explains that Swadesh used a specific algorithm for deriving the time scale for vocabulary loss and the finding was that 'after 1000 years 86 per cent of the core vocabulary is still retained'. Campbell (2013). Is of the view that 'there exists a core vocabulary which is universal and is less subject to replacement'. The foregoing reinforces the stability of core vocabulary. For instance, considering that terms for parts of the body (Arlotto, 1972) which include head, hand and eyes fall within the domains of core vocabulary, it would be hard to imagine why a speech community would borrow a word for *head*, *hand* or *eyes*.

Language contact is a phenomenon in which speech communities involved in the interaction get to adopt certain linguistic features from one another. The linguistic features adopted by the recipient language can still be traced back to the 'donor' language in most cases. At times it may be problematic to establish the direction of borrowing. The difficulty in establishing the direction of borrowing arises in situations where there has been contact over many years. In such cases, the borrowed words may have been integrated into the recipient language so much so that the native speakers may not know that they are borrowed words.

According to the way languages split, their geographic nearest neighbours also tend to be close neighbours phylogenetically, it is well

documented that Ekegusii and Dholuo have no such relationship. The shared lexical items are those which are likely to be related to trade. For instance, a tin which is used at the market as a unit of measure for grain is referred to as *gorogoro* in Dholuo, and *egororogo* in Ekegusii. This is a straight forward case of interaction at the market places where the tin is a ubiquitous item in transacting trade involving grain. The prosthetical element *e* in *egororogo* is a morphological requirement of Ekegusii nouns.

Many studies have been conducted on borrowing in many languages including Dholuo and Ekegusii. However, no study has been conducted on the borrowing of core vocabulary and 'frequently-used' words between Dholuo and Ekegusii. Secondly, no studies have been done in relation to semantic changes the said words may undergo in the two speech communities under study. The study therefore intends to fill in the identified gap by indicating that contrary to what is in the literature, core vocabulary and 'frequently-used' words can be borrowed.

The study had the following objectives:

- i) to establish whether the borrowed words assume new meanings in the recipient language,
- ii) to explain which linguistic community borrowed from the other.

The study investigated borrowing of core vocabulary and frequently-used words. Core vocabulary are words which belong certain domains such as kinship, colour, weather, etc. If Ekegusii borrows a core vocabulary from Dholuo then the original Ekegusii word for the same is likely to exist side-by-side with the borrowed word.

Hock and Joseph (2009) mention that a common result of linguistic contact is lexical borrowing. The borrowed words often undergo certain modifications required for their integration into the recipient language (Haspelmath 2009).

The study examined the semantic aspect of the core vocabulary items studied - that is - similarity (or lack of it) in meaning. Semantic change is perhaps the most obvious of linguistic changes. There are instances of widening, or narrowing of meanings and zero change of meaning when a word is borrowed from one language to the other. For instance, the Luo word *otenga* (the vowels in the word should be pronounced with a - ATR vocalic feature) is a type of dance but in Ekegusii *tenga* means 'to dance'. This is a good example of a word whose meaning has widened in the recipient language. The word which is a noun in the source language is used as a verb in Ekegusii.

Trudgill (2000) explains that a borrowing language uses the borrowed word with a narrower range of meaning than the donor language. For example, the Luo word *misumba* has two possible meanings: bachelor and servant. In Ekegusii the word specifically means 'servant' and not 'bachelor'.

The research examined the studies done locally on borrowing. Such studies have been done in a number of languages but the study focused only in studies done in Dholuo and Ekegusii. However, none of the studies addressed borrowing of core vocabulary and frequently-used words.

Arungo (2016) explores the semantic analysis of Ekegusii kinship terminologies. Her work focused on determining the cultural background meaning to the kinship terms. For instance, kinship may be as a result of relationship by blood or relationship by marriage. She used Fillmore's Frame semantics theory in her study. Her findings revealed that the Abagusii have a wide range kinship system which is classificatory, that is, a number of kinship terms are used in several kin relations. Patrilineal kin is given more emphasis than matrilineal kin. The study benefitted from her research work because kinship terms are part of core vocabulary.

Ilangakoon et al (2021) indicate that studies considered borrowings as 'filling a lexical gap' to denote concepts or objects that are novel to a particular culture. Core borrowings involve words

that duplicate words that are already in existence in the recipient language. The borrowing of core vocabulary therefore does not fill a lexical gap for a new concept and seems to go beyond logical explanation.

Katamba (1994:136) confirms the stability of core vocabulary in a roundabout way. He argues that an obvious reason for borrowing is to provide a word that meets a need for a word where none exists in the recipient language. This occurs when concepts, creatures, artefacts, institutions, religions etc. are encountered through contact with the speakers of another language and the words for them from the source language tend to be retained. Katamba's view obviously would not include core vocabulary items and frequently-used words which are readily available in all languages.

Arlotto (1972), Hock (2009), Crowley (2010), Dimmendaal (2011), Hock and Joseph (1996), and Matras (2009) address the concept of core vocabulary. Their views are that core vocabulary are resistant to borrowing. They are words which represent very common universal items (food, hut, etc.), the lower counting numerals (1-5), the parts of the body (head, hand etc.), familial terms (brother, mother etc.), and certain natural objects (sun, moon etc.), bodily functions such as breathing, excretion etc. (Arlotto, 1972:91).

The study drew a distinction between 'core vocabulary' and 'frequently-used' words. Core vocabulary is used in the study in the sense in which it is used in the literature. Frequently used words are those which are in everyday active use. They may include pronouns and words which are critical for daily needs and even survival e.g. *help*, *give* and deictic expressions such as *here*, *there*. A word such *give* is among the first words to be acquired by children.

Methodology

The study used a qualitative research design which employed the use of a questionnaire and an unstructured interview. The unstructured interview aimed to gain a rich understanding of the

'whys' and 'hows' of the phenomenon, as well as to explore subtle nuances of meaning. The questionnaire was administered to a purposively sampled population who are native speakers of Ekegusii. Having purposively sampled the population, the questionnaires were issued at random. The respondents provided a translation of the words in the questionnaire. The researcher, being a native speaker of Dholuo provided the Dholuo data then compared and analysed the meanings according to the translations provided by the respondents in order to determine if there were any differences in meaning. To minimize

researcher bias in data provision, the researcher used words the Swadesh List of core vocabulary and frequently used words.

The data was analysed by studying the consistency of the translations as done in the questionnaire. For instance, the Ekegusii translation for the word *God* was invariably *Nyasae*. A cognate analysis was conducted across three related languages (Guthrie's classification). The languages were Olusuba, Egekuria and Logooli. Cognate analysis involves identifying and studying words that not only share a common origin but have similar meaning.

<i>Dholuo</i>	<i>Ekegusii</i>	<i>Egekuria</i>	<i>Olusuba</i>	<i>Logooli</i>	<i>gloss</i>
Nyoyo	chinyoyo	amahengere	amaengere	mahengere	succotash

The word for succotash is *nyoyo* in Dholuo and *chinyoyo* in Ekegusii. It is clear from the data above that the three languages which are related to Ekegusii have more or less the same cognates which are quite different from the Ekegusii word which is very similar to the Dholuo word.

The 'original' Ekegusii word for *God* is *Engoro*. The unstructured interview sessions revealed that while *Engoro* should be the right word, it was not clear to the respondents as to why the word is not in active use. They attributed the reason to the Ekegusii Holy Bible in which the word *Nyasae* is used.

Results And Discussion

When words get borrowed from one language into another, they may undergo subtle or significant adjustments in meaning (Fromkin, 2003). The semantic changes may include the following: zero semantic change, semantic broadening, semantic narrowing and referent variant. When one language borrows from another, in most cases the borrowed word retains and corresponds to the original meaning in the source language (Winter-Froemel, 2013). Most of such words are borrowed with little modifications in their phonological aspect (Haugen, 1950).

The analysis of the data in regard to the first objective of the study is hereby presented. The lexical semantic analysis was used to determine how the lexemes relate to their referents in the world of both languages. The orthography of the following words differs in line with the phonological realignment in the recipient language.

Examples of nouns with zero semantic change in Dholuo-Ekegusii include:

- beti-ebeti* 'machete'
- chiro-echiro* 'market'
- ruoth-omoruoti* 'chief'
- Nyasaye-Nyasae* 'God'
- Jachien-Enyachieni* 'devil'
- atonga-egetonga* 'basket'

Examples of verbs with zero semantic change in Dholuo-Ekegusii include:

- chayo-ogochaya* 'to hold in contempt'
- chako-ogochaka* 'to start' or 'begin'
- chando-gochanda* 'to disturb'
- pako-baka* 'praise'
- mino-mina* 'to weave'

f) *twango-ogotwanga* 'to pound'

g) *boyo-koboa* 'to wrap'

Semantic broadening (also known as semantic expansion) is a process where a word assumes a more general meaning than in its earlier form. A lexical item which used to refer to a specific thing gets to refer to something broad.

Some of the words whose meanings have broadened in the Dholuo-Ekegusii borrowing situation include the following:

a) *otenga – ogotenga*

In Dholuo, *otenga* (-ATR) is a type of dance which is performed by rapidly shaking the shoulders back and forth. In Ekegusii, *ogotenga* is a word that means 'to dance' in general. The word has extended its meaning to cover a semantic field wider than that in Dholuo.

b) *ngori – engori*

The Luo word *ngori* refers to a thick heavy-duty rope woven to withstand heavy work. Rope that does not meet the said specifications cannot be called *ngori*. However, in Ekegusii, *engori* means rope without any qualifying specifications.

Narrowing, also known as specialization or restriction, is when a general term refers to a more specific thing than the original referent. The meaning becomes narrower. Some of the words whose meanings have narrowed in the Dholuo-Ekegusii borrowing situation are:

a) *owuoyo-obwoyo*

The two words mean cowdung but in different states. While in Dholuo *owuoyo* means cowdung (whether fresh or dry). In Ekegusii, *obwoyo* means 'dry cowdung' when used as farm manure. In Dholuo, *owuoyo* can also be used to mean farm manure. The meaning of the word has been restricted to assume a narrow and a more

specialised meaning as opposed to the meaning in Dholuo.

b) *misumba-omosomba*

The two words share the same semantic field. *Misumba* in Dholuo has two distinct meanings. The first meaning is *bachelor*. The same word also means a *slave* or *servant*. A speaker of Dholuo is able to distinguish the intended meaning from the context of use of the word. It follows that if the word is uttered in isolation or the context is not clear then it remains ambiguous.

In Ekegusii, however, *omosomba* means *servant* without any semantic inclination to bachelorhood.

c) *muma-emuma*

Muma in Dholuo precisely means oath. The Holy Bible is also known as *Muma* because it is a covenant between God and man. The sense of the word in Dholuo can therefore be understood only in the context of the conversation or utterance. *Emuma* in Ekegusii is rarely used to refer to the Holy Bible. The word *ebuku* (which is a corruption of 'book') is preferred. The mention of the word *ebuku* is not confused to mean *any* book. *Emuma* is used for oath.

Referent variant is used here to refer to a word with the same form but referring to different referents in the two languages. Hock (2009:258) states that if speakers of a given language take over references to fauna and flora, there is need for vocabulary to express these references.

A case in point is the Dholuo word *mbeche* 'warthog' in relation to the Ekegusii word *embeche* 'pig'/'warthog'. The warthog and the pig may bear some resemblance but they are distinctly different animals. However, it is not clear why the two languages would use the same word to refer to different animals in the real world. Quite a number of Ekegusii speakers interviewed contend that

embeche is pig as opposed to warthog while other Ekegusii speakers assert it is the latter. The study however established that the correct word is 'warthog' having based the logic in the finding on the Ekegusii saying, *okorete amaino buna aya embeche* 'you have exposed your teeth like those of a warthog'. Sayings are integral components of a community's folklore and are highly unlikely to be borrowed.

It follows that one language borrowed from the other. The question to address is how to ascertain the direction of borrowing. Dimmendaal (2011:181) indicates that there are three ways of doing so:

- i) Phonological features
- ii) Morphological properties
- iii) Forms which are cognate

Other than the three, the research considered the following additional clues as to the direction of borrowing:

- iv) Suppletion
- v) Availability of alternative words
- vi) Specialized use of language
- vii) Deictic expressions

Lexical items which have sounds which do not fall within the phonology of a particular language are most likely loans. This may include phonological patterns (and restrictions), for instance, Ekegusii phonology resists consonant clusters and does not accept consonant-final lexical items. Ekegusii sound system consists of segmental and suprasegmental elements. The suprasegmental (also known as prosodic) features include stress and tone. It is reasonable and logical to make an assumption that words can 'conjugate' as a result of tone to mark verb or noun in more or less the same way a verb conjugates to mark person and number. For instance, the Dholuo word *beti* 'machete', which is *ebeti* in Ekegusii can render itself to a variety of different shades of meaning brought about by tone as follows:

beti /beti/ (+ATR noun) - 'machete'

beti /beti/ (-ATR verb) - 'cut' using a machete

beto /beto/ (noun) - the 'act of cutting' using a machete

beto /beto/ (-ATR verb) - 'to cut' using a machete

In Ekegusii, the equivalent *ebeti* (noun) does not 'conjugate' in the same way as it does in Dholuo. The rich diversity brought about by tone is a pointer that the word is borrowed from Dholuo into Ekegusii.

Ekegusii has a total of twenty consonants. The sounds /b/, /d/ and /g/ do not have independent phonemic status. They occur as nasal compounds. They are preceded by bilabial nasal /m/, alveolar nasal /n/ and velar nasal /ŋ/ respectively. They are allophonic variants of the underlying phonemes. This argument means that it is unlikely to find an Ekegusii word with a surface realization of /b/, /d/ and /g/ as a pure consonant.

In Dholuo *beti* 'machete' the voiced bilabial plosive /b/, is articulated with aspiration. In Ekegusii, the /b/ is perceived as follows: it is not prenasalised, it is articulated without aspiration perhaps due to its intervocalic position, it is realized as a bilabial fricative /β/. Whenever the /b/ occurs word initially its articulation is undoubtedly perceived as bilabial fricative. In fact, in some speakers it is almost realized as the bilabial approximant /w/. This is also due to the assimilation process between the /b/ and /w/. For instance, in the common Ekegusii greeting in the morning,

bwakire /βwakire/

Similarly, the Dholuo word *got* 'mountain', which is *egoti* in Ekegusii, is realized without the prenasalised /g/. It should be noted that some speakers tend to articulate with a slight shade of prenasalisation.

Anttila (2009:159) states that one of the criteria of determining direction of borrowing is by morphological and grammatical analyses. If a word occurs in two unrelated languages, and it is an unanalysable sign in one and a motivated compound or derivation in terms of the grammar in the other, the situation is quite clear: it is a loan in the language where it is unanalysable.

The morphological make-up of lexical items can be used to help to determine the direction of borrowing of words. If in a particular language the word under study is morphologically complex, that is, if it has two or more morphemes, or it has a complex etymology than in the other language, or it cannot be morphologically analysed, then it can be said that the language with the morphologically complex word is the donor.

Having identified the core vocabulary items in both Dholuo and Ekegusii, it is worth considering evidence available to determine which language borrowed from the other. An analysis of each of the identified words was carried out to establish the nuances of meaning of the individual morphemes. If a particular word is morphologically complex or if it has an etymology which is complex than the same form in the other language, then it is most probably (or certainly), that the donor language is the one which is complex. A morphologically complex word is that which has two or more morphemes which can be

analysed separately for meaning. The recipient language is most likely to have the same word only in monomorphemic form.

For example, the following monomorphemic Ekegusii word *enyachieni* 'devil' and the Dholuo word *jachien*. In Dholuo, the word is bimorphemic. It can be analysed into its two syllables, *jachien*, *ja* 'person of' + *chien* 'haunt'. The literal meaning in Dholuo is a 'person who haunts', otherwise known as the 'devil'.

Another important distributional fact relevant for the identification of direction of borrowing is conducting a cross-check with cognates in other related languages. Clues from cognates can be used to carry out phylogenetic analysis with the aim of detecting if the data reveal a 'phylogenetic conflict'.

An update of Guthrie's classification of Bantu languages indicates that Ekegusii, Egekuria and Logooli are phylogenetically close. 'A single code has been used to designate several (very) closely related varieties' (Nurse 2003). Logooli is the language spoken by the Maragoli people who live in Vihiga county in western Kenya. The three share the same language group code, E41(J) Logooli, E42(J) Kisii and E43(J) Kuria (Nurse, 2014). Another speech community which is also linguistically close to the Abagusii are the Suba. In Guthrie's classification, Suba is assigned the code E403(J).

Dholuo	Ekegusii	Egekuria	Olusuba	Logooli	Gloss
misumba	omosomba	omokorameremo	omuguru	mutugwa	bachelor
nyoyo	chinyoyo	amahengere	amaengere	mahengere	succotash
ruoth	omoruoti	omogambi	omukama	omwami	chief

The Dholuo lexical items above have a striking similarity with the Ekegusii items. On the other hand, the equivalent words in Egekuria, Olusuba and Logooli show phylogenetic relationship.

Suppletion is a form of morphological irregularity whereby a change in a grammatical category triggers a change in word form, with a different root substituting for the normal one. Suppletion involves forms which share phonological material

such as *child* and *children*. Dholuo example of suppletion is *chando* 'disturb' and *chendo* 'disturbance'. In Ekegusii, an example of suppletion is *omwana* 'child', *abana* 'children'.

Dholuo has a wide range of vocabulary items that undergo suppletion. In this case, only borrowed core vocabulary items have been considered for comparison with the Ekegusii words. The point of comparison is that while the vocabulary items in

Dholuo change category (from noun to verb) as a result of suppletion, the Ekegusii counterparts do not have verb forms derived from the nouns and are therefore lacking in versatility as shown in below.

Derivation due to Suppletion

Dholuo		Ekegusii
noun	verb	Noun
sigana	gano	omogano
achaya	chayo	ogochaya
dwar	dwaro	ogotwara
tweng'o	twang'o	ogotwang'a
twengo	twango	ogotwanga
bocho	boyo	okoboa

Availability of alternative words can be seen here as the availability of synonymous lexical items. Synonymy is a semantic relation whose true test is the ability of two words to be substituted for one another without a change in meaning (Meyer, 2009).

Edmonds and Hirst (2002:107) argue that, 'Absolute synonymy, if it exists at all, is quite rare' it would mean that if words were truly synonymous, they 'would be able to be substituted one for the other in any context in which their common sense is denoted with no change in truth value, communicative effect, or meaning. The following core vocabulary items are absolute synonyms in Ekegusii. Each pair is mutually interchangeable with no change in truth value, communicative effect, or meaning.

Proverbs and Sayings

Dholuo	Ekegusii	gloss
<i>atonga</i>	<i>egetonga</i>	basket
<i>osuri</i>	<i>egesuri</i>	A stick perpendicularly affixed at the apex of the roof of traditional huts.
<i>chayo</i>	<i>ogochaya</i>	contempt
<i>kwesi</i>	<i>ekebwesi</i>	pipe for smoking tobacco
<i>nyoyo</i>	<i>chinyoyo</i>	Maize and beans cooked together.
<i>siro</i>	<i>esiro</i>	support

1) *Atonga mayot ema iyombogo koth.*

'You can escape an approaching storm if you are carrying a light basket.'

- i. *Nyasaye* (Dholuo), *Nyasae/Engoro* (Ekegusii) 'God'
- ii. *Ruoth* (Dholuo), *omoruoti/ omogambi* (Ekegusii) 'chief' or 'important person'
- iii. *Nanga* (Dholuo), *eyanga/engobo* 'cloth'
- iv. *Beti* (Dholuo), *ebeti/omoro* 'machete'
- v. *Ochuri* (Dholuo), *ochuri/obosontonto* 'digested food stuff in a cow, a goat or a sheep's small intestines.
- vi. *Rabuon* (Dholuo), *amabuoni/rinyabwari* 'potato'

The following are verbs with no semantic change:

- i. *(Go)abal* (Dholuo), *goaka opari/goaka ontimbu* 'to swim'
- ii. *Twango* (Dholuo), *ogotwanga/kong'onta* 'to crush by beating'
- iii. *Mino* (Dholuo), *okomina/ogosisa* 'to weave' as in making rope
- iv. *Boyo* (Dholuo), *okoboa/ogosiba* 'to wrap' something
- v. *Hinyo* (Dholuo), *okoinya/koumisa/okoremaria* 'to injure'

There are certain core vocabulary items which are used in proverbs and sayings in Dholuo but not in Ekegusii. This is a pointer that the donor language is the one that uses the word in proverbs and sayings.

2) *Osuri ema ong'eyo weche ot.*

'It is the stick on the roof that knows the secrets of the household.'

3) *Alot michayo ema tieko kuon.*

'It is the despised vegetable that finishes ugali.'

4) *Ng'at matek otoy kyesi meru.*

'A strong person has broken the pipe of your mother'

This is a saying used to mean that you cannot fight a strong person no matter the level of provocation. Breaking one's mother's pipe was considered extreme provocation.

5) *Jarikni jamuod nyoyo gi kuoyo.*

'An impatient person eats succotash with sand in it.'

6) *Wuoyi siro*

'A boy/man is a pillar.'

In addition to having meaning, words also have a pointing function commonly referred to as deixis (Meyer, 2009). It is the ability of words to refer to points in the external world. According to Yule (2004:129), deixis are words that cannot be interpreted unless the physical context, more so, the physical context of the speaker is known. Deixis is used to point to things, point to locations, and to point to time. Yule (1996:9), explains that deixis is 'pointing' via language. Any linguistic form that is used to 'point' is called deictic expression. It is one of the most basic things we do with utterances. In order to underscore how basic these vocabulary items are, he explains that 'they are among the first forms to be spoken by very young children'.

The study was interested in one aspect of spatial deixis (here, there, yonder), more specifically, the proximal term 'here'. In a spoken face-to-face interaction, 'here' means 'near the speaker'.

Dholuo *ka* 'here'

Ekegusii *iga* 'here'

Egekuria *hano* 'here'

Olusuba *ano* 'here'

Logooli *yaba* 'here'

An analysis of *ka* and *iga* shows a phonological process of lenition. A *Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics* 6th edition describes lenition as a term used in phonology to refer to a weakening in the overall strength of a sound e.g. change from a voiceless sound to a voiced sound. The definition is consistent with the change from /k/ to /g/. It can be argued that the voiceless velar stop /k/ changed to be the voiced velar stop /g/ as a result of 'ease of articulation' which is also known as 'economy of effort'. The 'ease of articulation' is a change that makes sounds easier to articulate. Economy of effort assumes that articulation of speech sounds is an activity that requires effort which can be likened to climbing a stair case.

If these two speech sounds (/k/ and /g/) are decomposed into their articulatory properties, they will differ in only one articulatory component - the state of the glottis. The former is voiceless while the latter is voiced. The ease of articulation in this case is as a result of the influence exercised by the sound segments which are in contact with the sound /k/. The sounds being the vowels /i/ and /a/. The influence exercised by the two vowel sounds is that of voicing. Vowels are normally voiced and the voicing feature affects a voiceless consonant occupying an intervocalic position.

Katamba (1996) gives a 'commonly accepted phonological strength hierarchy'. He indicates that,

VOICELESS > VOICED

The sign (>) indicates a step towards a 'weaker' pronunciation. When /g/ and /k/ are decomposed into their articulatory properties, they differ in only one aspect. The two sounds constitute a natural class of velar stops.

Looking at the place of articulation for the two sounds using the binary features system show similar features.

-bilabial
-labiodental
-dental
-alveolar
-palatal
+velar
-uvular

The manner of articulation when studied against the following parameters; continuant, nasal, strident, lateral and delayed release, also reveal similarity of /k/ and /g/ as follows:

[-cont]

[-nas]

[-strid]

[-lat]

[-del rel]

The only remaining parameter in which the two sounds differ is that /k/ is [-voice] while /g/ is [+voice].

The same lenition involving the two sounds is also noticed in the words *Kuja* and *Gucha*. The names refer to a major river that transcends both Gusiland and Luoland and empties its waters into Lake Victoria. The river is known as *Kuja* by the Dholuo speakers while the Ekegusii speakers refer to it as *Gucha*. It is possible that the name of the river could have been borrowed from Dholuo, then it had to undergo Dahl's law in order to gain acceptance into the Ekegusii phonology. The initial voiced stop had then to be followed by a voiceless affricate - a voicing dissimilation.

Conclusion

The research findings revealed that there are a number of core vocabulary items and frequently-

used words which are similar in the two languages studied. The words studied are those which are resistant to borrowing. These words do not fill any lexical gaps in the recipient language. The analyses reveal that the donor language is Dholuo with Ekegusii being the recipient language.

The study was concluded by looking at the relevance of the theory of linguistic interference to the study as follows:

- i) Ekegusii borrowed core vocabulary and frequently-used words from Dholuo.
- ii) Some of the core vocabulary and frequently-used words function as synonyms in Gusiland.
- iii) Most of the borrowed words retained their meaning in the recipient language.

Recommendations

At the end of this study, it was not clear why core vocabulary items and frequently-used words should be borrowed because this type of borrowing does not satisfy the reasons for borrowing spelt out by various linguists. The closest it gets to reasons for borrowing is perhaps the prestige and /or dominance. The history of the two communities does not indicate that Dholuo enjoyed prestige status over Ekegusii at any time. There is no indication in history that the Luo as a nation dominated the Abagusii socially or politically. In any case, English, which has enjoyed dominance and prestige status for over a century has not infiltrated the domain of core vocabulary. It would be fulfilling to establish why a linguistic community would be interested in borrowing words which they 'do not need'.

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

The corresponding author used the spelling and grammar check in Microsoft Word to review the document for spelling errors and errors of grammar. The author, however, takes responsibility for the content.

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CRediT authorship contribution statement

Omolo: Conceptualization, Writing – original draft. **Pamela:** supervision, review & editing, data curation. **Odero:** supervision, visualization, review & editing. **Nyakoe:** supervision, visualization, review & editing.

Declaration of conflict of interest

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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