
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Core/Cultural Borrowing in Sabaot from Kiswahili: An analysis of Sabaot/Kiswahili Bilinguals in Mount Elgon Region, Kenya

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| ABSTRACT

This study is an analysis of lexical borrowing of nominals in Sabaot from Kiswahili. The two languages under study differ from each other in significant ways. Kiswahili, for example, is a language of the Niger-Congo family classified by Ethnologue as ISO 639-3: SWA, while on the other hand, Sabaot belongs to the Southern Nilotic group that occupies the Mount Elgon area. This research was guided by the specific objective; to investigate the spoken language of young, middle-aged, and older Sabaot/Kiswahili bilingual speakers. This research was guided by two theories, namely Borrowing Transfer Theory by Terence Odlin (1989) and Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory (EVT) by Giles and Taylor (1977). As a way of data collection, a wordlist and questionnaires were issued to 30 Sabaot/Kiswahili bilinguals of Chepyuk ward in Bungoma County, Kenya. The results of the wordlist analysis indicated that there were extensive core borrowings of Kiswahili nouns into the Sabaot language. The findings further showed that the core borrowing of nouns was more among the younger and middle-aged than among the older Sabaot/Kiswahili bilinguals.

| KEYWORDS

Core/Cultural Borrowing; Kiswahili; Sabaot/Kiswahili Bilinguals; Mount Elgon Region; Kenya

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1. Introduction

Language is a combination of symbols and sounds we use to express our ideas, experiences, and emotions (Bruce, 2008). We need a language to communicate with people around us, express our identity, and also carry out trade. Often, when different languages come into contact through their speakers, the effects of language contact are realized as: language maintenance, language shift, borrowing, bilingualism, death, and code-switching. For the purpose of this research, we concentrated on language borrowing as a result of contact between Sabaot and Kiswahili in western Kenya.

According to Mesthrie et al. (2000), "borrowing is a technical term for incorporation of an item from one language into another, for example, words, grammatical elements or sounds" (p.243). Kamwamangulu (1989) defines borrowing as integration of borrowed items into the borrowing language system. Thomason and Kaufman (1988), for instance, refer to borrowing as "the incorporation of foreign features into a group's native by speakers of that language; the native language is maintained, though is changed by the addition of incorporated features." The language that borrows a language feature is referred to as the "recipient language." Alternatively, the language which provides a language feature is the "source language" (donor language) (Winford, 2003).

In a borrowing situation, the first foreign element to enter the borrowing language is the lexicon, which depicts the culture of its speakers. Words adopted this way are called loanwords or borrowings. Out of the borrowed words, nouns are the most borrowed category (Myers-Scotton, 2002). Borrowing of the lexicon is a marker to show that a language grows (Fasold & Linton, 2006). Kiswahili, a Bantu language, has borrowed from other languages, especially English and Arabic (Zawawi, 1975), and has grown to become an East African regional language and a lingua franca. This research focused on nouns borrowed from Kiswahili into Sabaot because, as Hock (1986) puts it, lexical borrowing usually takes place from the more to less prestigious culture (prestigious language affords greater upward social and economic mobility than others).

According to Myers-Scotton (2006), two types of borrowing are evident; cultural and core borrowings. Cultural borrowings constitute words that express concepts that do not exist in the lexicon of the recipient language. For example, the word "sahani" (plate) is culturally borrowed from Kiswahili and is referred to as "sahaniit" in the Sabaot language. On the other hand, core borrowings are words that are already expressed by an equivalent lexical item in the recipient language (ibid). For instance, the word "barabara" (road) is core borrowed from Kiswahili into Sabaot and is referred to as "barabaret", and yet the Sabaot language has a word for it as "keldo/areet."

While cultural borrowings from Kiswahili enrich the Sabaot language in terms of vocabulary, core borrowings, on the contrary, endanger the Sabaot language. This research, therefore, investigated the core and cultural nominals borrowed into Sabaot from Kiswahili by Sabaot/Kiswahili bilinguals. An investigation of the non-linguistic factors motivating the Sabaots to borrow from Kiswahili was done, and finally, the strategies that Sumaneet Centre has adopted to revitalize the Sabaot language were found.

The investigation of language contact phenomena between the Sabaot and Kiswahili bilinguals in western Kenya can prompt extraordinary advantages, both practical and theoretical. Studying the languages in contact provides one with the understanding that there are attributes that prompt a language to borrow from other languages, for instance, issues of identity and prestige of the lending language. Comprehension of the social powers that guide and oblige languages in contact to borrow is of fundamental significance both to language planning in sectors such as; education and politics and to understanding the ways languages change.

Borrowing is usually distinguished from Code-Switching. Lipski (2005) notes that borrowing means the donor language words have been incorporated into the lexicon of the recipient language and is, therefore, part of the linguistic competence of the speakers of the target language. On the other hand, Code-Switching includes; linguistic items that occur spontaneously in the target language discourse but which are not part of the lexicon of the recipient language. It is apt to point out that the scope of Code-Switching was beyond the scope of this research.

Borrowing is a marker to show that languages are dynamic and are ever growing. A number of studies have been carried out on lexical borrowing in Kenya. For instance, Wamalwa (1997) accounts for the sociolinguistic principles that govern Kiswahili lexical absorption into Lubukusu, while Kitembe (2003) examines the negative effects of English on the Luhya language, but none to date, according to the findings of the researcher has focused on the core and cultural borrowings of nominals as a result of Sabaot/Kiswahili contact situation. The researcher administered questionnaires and a word list to 30 Sabaot/Kiswahili bilinguals in order to establish core and cultural borrowings into the Sabaot language.

2. Target Population

The population for this research was the Sabaot/Kiswahili bilingual speakers who reside in the Mt. Elgon region. A total of 30 respondents, equal in the number of both genders, were sampled out purposively from Chepyuk Ward. They were then subjected to a wordlist and questionnaires. The respondents included the younger, middle-aged, and older Sabaot/Kiswahili bilinguals.

2.1 Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

In order to carry out this research, 30 respondents from Chepyuk Ward were sampled purposively. This allows the researcher to use respondents with the required information in relation to the objective of the study (Mugenda, 2008). According to Milroy (1987), a number as low as 24 respondents are enough to enable a researcher to make a generalization for a study. Therefore, 30 respondents were deemed appropriate for this research. He further points out that the use of larger samples in dealing with linguistic surveys is not important since it results in redundancy. He further reiterates that this brings problems when handling data, which results in diminished returns.

The respondents with the required traits were pegged on the variable of age and the typicality of one being a Sabaot/Kiswahili bilingual speaker. For the purpose of this research, anybody between the ages of 16-29 years was treated as younger; middle-aged is between the ages of 30-49 years, while anybody above 51 years was treated as older (Contasti, 1980). After identifying the first respondents purposively, these groups helped the researcher to identify other Sabaot/Kiswahili bilingual speakers through the approach of 'friend of a friend' (Milroy & Milroy, 1972).

3. Results

The objective of the research is “to determine core and cultural borrowings in Sabaot from Kiswahili among younger and older Sabaot /Kiswahili bilinguals.” Core borrowing refers to loanwords that replace existing native words (Haspelmath, 2008, p.48). In the case of this research, it is the Sabaot language borrowing words from Kiswahili, and the Sabaot language has words already for those concepts. Core borrowing in the Sabaot language is possibly motivated by prestige associated with the lending language (Kiswahili). On the other hand, cultural borrowing refers to the borrowing of words for new objects and concepts (from Kiswahili) that the target language (Sabaot) does not have words for them. Cultural borrowing is meant to fill a lexical gap that exists in the target language. Therefore, it is important to mention that when Kiswahili words are borrowed into the Sabaot language, they will be domesticated into the Sabaot language system so as to end with consonants in most cases, which is contrary to the lending language (Kiswahili).

It is also of great essence to point out that the consonants ending in most Sabaot nouns are either “t” in singular nouns or “k” when the noun is plural. However, we have other exceptions, where the noun will end with a vowel, for instance, **momo** (mother). Nouns that end with vowels constitute a small number in Sabaot language as compared to the ones that end with consonants.

3.1: Presentation of data on core/cultural borrowing into Sabaot from Kiswahili

The data collected using the wordlist were further categorized into two parts; the new Sabaot (corrupted version) and the old Sabaot (the standard Sabaot). The nouns that were categorized as being new Sabaot involved core borrowed nouns from Kiswahili, while the ones which were similar in both old and new Sabaot were either culturally borrowed or the issue of borrowing had not affected it at all (dominant variant). The frequency for each noun was then converted into a percentage so as to aid in the analysis of data. The data collected in this part was both quantitative (percentages) and qualitative (nouns). The data collected was then presented and analyzed, as shown in the following tables.

Table 1: Body parts nouns borrowed into Sabaot from Kiswahili

	Nouns in Kiswahili	Gloss in English	New Sabaot	Token X/30	%	Old Sabaot	Token X30	%	Co/ Cu/Dv
1	Ulimi	Tongue	Ulimit	7	23.3	Ng'alapta	23	76.7	Co
2	Mdomo	Mouth	Mdomot	03	10	kutiit	27	90	Co
3	Mkono	Hand	Aaut	30	100	Aaut	30	100	Dv
4	Mguu	Leg	Kirengeet	30	100	Kirengeet	30	100	Dv
5	Shingo	Neck	Shingot	9	30	Katiit	21	70	Co
6	Moyo	heart	Moyot	04	13.3	Mukulokto	26	86.7	Co
7	Goti	Knee	Magotit	10	33.3	Kutunynto	20	66.7	Co
8	Mfupa	Bone	Mfupet	16	53.3	Koet	14	46.7	Co
9	Mgongo	Back	Mgongot	11	36.7	Pateet	19	63.3	Co
10	Kichwa	Head	Metiit	30	100	Metiit	30	100	Dv

Key

New Sabaot – corrupted version
 Old Sabaot – standard/acceptable version

Co - core borrowed nouns

Cu – culturally borrowed nouns

Dv – dominant variant

X – number of respondents

3.2 Analysis of body parts nouns

From table 1 above, it is evident that only 3 out of the 10 nouns on body parts which, includes mkono (hand), mguu (leg), and kichwa (head), have not been core borrowed and are therefore the dominant variant and this constitutes 33.3% while the rest have been core borrowed. The other seven nouns on body parts that have not been core borrowed could be attributed to the fact that the Sabaot/Kiswahili bilinguals are familiar with them and hence their correct usage. The core borrowing of the body shown in the Sabaot language is a serious threat to the survival of the language. This is an argument that is strongly supported by Tadmor (2009), who argues that the lexical items relating to body parts are the least to be replaced by loanwords.

According to the Mt. Elgon strategic planning (2005-2010), Inter-marriage between Sabaots and Bukusus/Iteso is a common phenomenon in the Chepyuk ward (Makuatano centre). In such homes, there are cases of parents and their offspring using Kiswahili in their discourse at the expense of the Sabaot language. However, in cases where they attempt to speak in the Sabaot language, the new Sabaot (corrupted Sabaot language with a lot of core borrowed nouns) is used. This poses a great threat to the survival and transmission of Sabaot culture to the next generation.

The next semantic field that is analyzed is food and drinks, as presented in table 2 below.

Table 2: Food and drinks nouns borrowed into Sabaot from Kiswahili

	Nouns in Kiswahili	Gloss in English	New Sabaot	Token X/30	%	Old Sabaot	Token X/30	%	Co/ Cu/Dv
1	Pombe	Alcohol	pombe	05	16.7	Mayiek	25	83.3	Co
2	Maji	Water	beeko	30	100	Beeko	30	100	Dv
3	Ugali	Ugali	Ugalit	4	13.3	Kimnyeet	26	86.7	Co
4	Maziwa	Milk	Cheeko	30	100	Cheeko	30	100	Dv
5	Nyama	Meat	bento	30	100	Bento	30	100	Dv
6	Malenge	Pumpkin	malenget	08	26.7	Mariangait	22	73.3	Co

From table 2 above, the nouns that have been core borrowed include: pombe(alcohol) as “pombe” at 16.7%, which is still at the level of code-switching, ugali (ugali) as “ugalit” at 13.3%, malenge (Pumpkin) as “malenget” at 26.7%. The nouns which are the dominant variant include maji (water), maziwa (milk), and nyama (meat), as they are always used in the home domain. The reason why some Sabaot/Kiswahili bilinguals don't know how the word malenge (pumpkin) is referred to is that the vegetable is being replaced with modern ones (Kipsisey, 2010).

Technology items are the next semantic field that is analyzed as presented in table 3 below

Table 3: Technology nouns borrowed into Sabaot from Kiswahili

	Nouns in Kiswahili	Gloss in English	New Sabaot	Token X/30	%	Old Sabaot	Token X/30	%	Co/Cu/Dv
1	kompyuta	Computer	kompyuteet	30	100	Kompyuteet	30	100	Cu
2	Simu	Phone	simuut	30	100	Simuut	30	100	Cu
3	Gari	Car	kariit	30	100	Kariit	30	100	Cu
4	baiskeli	Bicycle	baiskilit	11	36.7	Ntikait	19	63.3	Co
5	Radio	Radio	rediot	30	100	Rediot	30	100	Cu
6	Barua	Letter	baruet	07	23.3	Bakalyeet	22	73.3	Co

The findings of table 3 above reveal that 4 out of the 6 nouns on technology have been culturally borrowed into the Sabaot language system. In terms of percentage, this represents 66.6%. The Sabaot/Kiswahili bilinguals have culturally borrowed the words kompyuta (computer) into Sabaot as “kompyuteet”; simu (phone) as “simuut”; gari (car) as “kariit,” and redio (radio) as “rediot” since the Sabaot language lacks these vocabularies in their language systems because they have been brought about by technology and therefore the 4 Kiswahili nouns have been domesticated into Sabaot language system. This has been done to enrich the vocabulary of the Sabaot language. This is an argument that is supported by Myers Scotton (2000), who points out that cultural borrowing fills a lexical gap since these words do not exist in the target language.

In another instance, the findings reveal that 2 out of the 6 technological items have been core borrowed by some Sabaot/Kiswahili bilinguals. This includes: baiskeli (bicycle) as “baiskilit” at 36.7% instead of “ntikait” and barua (letter) as “baruet” at 23.3% instead of “bakalyet”. The reason why letters are no longer common among the Sabaot/Kiswahili bilinguals is that they are currently being replaced by other means of communication like the internet and phones.

The next semantic field that is analyzed is the physical world nouns, as presented in table 4 below.

Table 4: Physical world nouns borrowed into Sabaot from Kiswahili

	Nouns in Kiswahili	Gloss in English	New Sabaot	Token X/30	%	Old Sabaot	Token X/30	%	Co/Dv
1	mwezi	Moon	mwesit	07	23.3	Araweet	23	76.7	Co
2	Moto	Fire	maata	30	100	Maata	30	100	Dv
3	Mvua	Rain	mvuet	09	30	Ropta	21	70	Co
4	Njaa	Hunger	kamauut	30	100	Kamauut	30	100	Dv
5	moshi	Smoke	moshit	08	26.7	Kiyetiit	24	80	Co
6	Jifu	Ash	jifut	09	30	Areek	21	70	Co
7	Kuni	firewood	kunik	03	10	Kweniik	27	90	Co

From table 4 above, the core borrowed nouns from Kiswahili into Sabaot include mwezi (moon) as “mwesit” at 23.3%, mvua (rain) as “mvuet” at 30%, moshi (smoke) as “moshit” at 26.7%, jifu (ash) at 30% and kuni (firewood) as “kunik” at 10%. This constitutes 5 out of 7 nouns which translates to 71.4% as far as core borrowing of physical world nouns is concerned. This could have been contributed by the lack of storytelling sessions in most homes that used to help the children understand their physical environment better. In addition, Kinship terms borrowed into Sabaot from Kiswahili are analyzed in table 5, shown below.

Table 5: Kinship terms borrowed into Sabaot from Kiswahili

	Nouns in Kiswahili	Gloss in English	New Sabaot	Token X/30	%	Old Sabaot	Token X/30	%	Co/Dv
1	Baba	Father	baba	12	40	Aboo	18	60	Co
2	Mama	mother	mama	13	43.3	Momo	17	56.7	Co
3	Mvulana	Boy	weriit	30	100	Weriit	30	100	Dv
4	Msichana	Girl	cheptoo	30	100	Cheptoo	30	100	Dv
5	Mjomba	Uncle	maama	30	100	Maama	30	100	Dv
6	Shangazi	Aunt	shangasit	14	46.7	Sengee	16	53.3	Co

The outcome of table 5 points out that core borrowed nouns include: baba (father) as “baba” at 40%, mama (mother) as “mama” at 43.3%, and shangasi (aunt) as “shangasit” at 46.7%. Again the two nouns mama (mother) as “mama” and baba (father) as “baba” are still at the level of code-switching. The other three nouns, mvulana (boy) as “weriit,” “msichana” (girl) as “cheptoo,” and mjomba (uncle) as “maama,” are the dominant variants and are being used as expected.

Finally, the last semantic field of vegetation and agriculture is analyzed and presented in table 6 below.

Table 6: Vegetation and Agriculture terms borrowed into Sabaot from Kiswahili

	Nouns in Kiswahili	Gloss in English	New Sabaot	Token X/30	%	Old Sabaot	Token X/30	%	Co/Dv
1	Mti	Tree	mitit	03	10	Ketit	27	90	Co
2	Ndizi	banana	ndisit	04	13.3	Ntotiantet	26	86.7	Co
3	Nyasi	grass	nyasit	10	33.3	Susweek	20	66.7	Co
4	Msitu	forest	msitut	11	36.7	Uyeet	19	63.3	Co
5	mchanga	Soil	mchangeek	08	26.7	Tang“yiek	22	73.3	Co

From the results of table 6 above, 90% of the respondents refer to mti (tree) as “ketit” in Sabaot, and 63.3% refer to msitu (forest) as “uyeet” in Sabaot, while the rest refer to these terms using the new Sabaot as “mitit” (trees) at 10% and (msitut) at 36.1% respectively.

3.3 Summary of findings from the tables.

It is important to note the following from the data presented in tables 1 to 6 above: To begin with, 25 out of the 40-wordlist were core borrowed into Sabaot language by some sabaot/Kiswahili bilingual which translates to 62.5%. This percentage is very high and sends a very strong message that the Kiswahili language is a threat to the existence of the Sabaot language.

Secondly, the core borrowing of basic vocabularies, which are believed to be the most resistant according to Swadesh (1952) that are evidenced in the Sabaot language, shows that the Sabaot language is on the brink of being absorbed by the Kiswahili language, which is deemed to be more prestigious than Sabaot. However, in as much as code-switching was beyond the scope of the research according to the assumptions cited in chapter one, some of them came up in these findings. For instance, pombe (alcohol) was referred to as 'pombe' by 16.7% of the Sabaot/ Kiswahili bilinguals; baba (father) as "baba" at 40% while mama (mother) as "mama" at 43.3%. It can therefore be argued that the code-switches evident in the Sabaot borrowed nouns are in the initial stages of becoming loan words in the Sabaot language (Gardner-Chloros, 2009).

The outcomes of this research were also analyzed in terms of age grading, that is, the core/cultural borrowing level among the younger (16-29 years), middle-aged (30-49 years), and older (51+ years) Sabaot/Kiswahili bilinguals. The differences in the level of borrowings among the three groups are presented in table 7 as presented below.

Table 7: Frequency of occurrence of Core/Cultural nouns borrowed into Sabaot from Kiswahili per semantic fields according to age grading

Semantic fields/Age of Respondents	Younger group (16-29yrs.)		Middle-aged group (30-49 yrs.)		Older group (50+ yrs.)	
	Male%	Female%	Male%	Female%	Male %	Female%
	Body parts	5	2.5	5	0	0
Technology items	5	5	2.5	2.5	5	2.5
Kinship	2.5	2.5	5	2.5	0	0
Physical world	5	2.5	2.5	2.5	5	2.5
Food & drinks	2.5	5	2.5	5	0	0
Vegetation & agriculture	2.5	0	2.5	5	5	0
Total %	22.5	20	20	17.5	15	5
Combined%(male+female)	42.5%		37.5%		20%	

From table 7 above, there are noticeable differences in the level of lexical borrowing among three age-grading clusters and also in terms of gender. The level of borrowing among the younger group (16-29 years) is 42.5%, the middle-aged group (30-49years) is 37.5%, and the older group(51+years) is 20%. The differences among the three age groupings are evident and indicate that there is massive borrowing between the younger and middle-aged group, that is at 80%, and by the time they become older, we expect them not to change in the way they speak as they will continue to use the core borrowed nouns from Kiswahili language even in their older age which indicates that Kiswahili is a serious danger to the existence of Sabaot language.

The findings further reveal that women in the three groupings borrow less as compared to their male counterparts, for instance, 20% in the younger group, 17.5% in the middle-aged group, and 5% in the older group. This is in support of the argument advanced by scholars that women are more conservative and are slower in embracing changes that can occur in a given language (Milroy, 1980 & kebeya, 2008).

In addition, the results reveal that the older Sabaot/Kiswahili bilinguals have borrowed more in the semantic field of the physical world at 7.5% as compared to other semantic fields. The motivation for this could be because the older speakers have had a longer duration interacting with the physical world than the younger Sabaot/Kiswahili bilinguals, and hence they have a better understanding of it.

On the other hand, the younger and middle-aged Sabaot/Kiswahili bilinguals have borrowed more in the semantic field of technology items at 15% as compared to other semantic fields. The rationale for this could be that since technology is a recent

phenomenon, the younger Sabaot/Kiswahili is embracing it more than, the older speakers; on the top of the list is the use of computers and phones.

From the findings, it is clear that the younger and middle-aged groups have borrowed more than the older group. The outcome of this research agrees with (Poplack, 1988), who argues that younger speakers are more likely to borrow more than older speakers. It further agrees with Chambers (1995), who argues that younger speakers of a language tend to be more innovative; for instance, they overproduce new terms in their speech than the older speakers in a speech community.

The higher levels of core borrowing of Kiswahili nouns into Sabaot among the younger Sabaot/Kiswahili bilinguals could mean that the Kiswahili language has a stronger identity and recognition than the Sabaot language. This conveys a strong message that the Kiswahili language is a threat to the existence of the Sabaot language.

4. Conclusion

The outcome of this research supports the ideas postulated by Odlin (1989) in his model 'Borrowing Transfer Theory', which states when two languages come into contact, usually, there is diffusion or transfer of materials from one language to the other. Furthermore, he states that the transfer of linguistic features is usually from the language of a higher status/superior (Kiswahili) to a lower status/inferior language (Sabaot). Apparently, the first item to enter the borrowing (recipient) language is the nouns, as in the case of the Sabaot language borrowing nouns from Kiswahili.

The findings in the data analyzed in this part show that there is extensive core borrowing of basic vocabulary items (nouns) from Kiswahili among the Sabaot/Kiswahili bilinguals, which is limelight to show that there is a weak urge for identity among the Sabaot culture as compared to Kiswahili (Greenberg, 1957:39). It is again evident that core borrowing is found to be more among the younger and middle-aged Sabaot/Kiswahili bilinguals than among the older ones. The extensive core borrowing is a major threat to the Sabaot language's survival. It also emerged there were some loan nouns from Kiswahili into Sabaot, which were still in the form of switches and were yet to be adopted into the phonotactics of the Sabaot language system.

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