



Core vocabulary and frequently-used words between Dholuo and Ekegusii languages of Kenya

James Omolo¹
 Pamela Oloo²
 Omondi Odero³
 Damaris Nyakoe⁴

¹jomolous@yahoo.com (+254 722 530 325)

²aoloo2001@yahoo.com

³erickodero@yahoo.com

⁴nyakoeg@gmail.com

¹<http://orcid.org/0009-0005-7851-0646>

²<https://orcid.org/0009-0007-4628-9742>

³<https://orcid.org/0009-0004-4529-8282>

⁴<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4851-3756>

^{1,3,4}Rongo University, ²Maseno University, ^{1,2,3,4}Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on establishing if core vocabulary (also known as basic vocabulary) and frequently-used words can be borrowed in linguistic contact situations. The languages studied were Dholuo and EkeGusii. The two languages have no phylogenetic relationship. Dholuo is a Nilotic language and EkeGusii belongs to the Bantu family of languages. The two linguistic communities have been contiguous for possibly more than 400 hundred years. In such contact situations, borrowing of linguistic items across the two languages is inevitable. The linguistic items which are susceptible to borrowing in contact situations are those which belong to the peripheral vocabulary. However, core vocabulary are those which belong to certain domains which accompany linguistic communities independently of their specific environments. Such vocabulary tend to resist borrowing because they do not fulfil the reasons for borrowing which are spelt out in the literature. The objective of the study was to establish if core vocabulary and frequently-used words have been borrowed as a result of contact between the Luo and the Abagusii. The research used a qualitative research approach. A questionnaire was used as the data collection instrument in which the respondents gave a translation of the words into EkeGusii. The questionnaire had a list of words which fall within the domains of core vocabulary. There were 96 respondents who were EkeGusii speakers who were purposively sampled. The sample size was arrived at by data saturation formula which takes a mean of 12 respondents in qualitative research. They were expected to translate each of the words in the list into EkeGusii. The sample size is a microcosm of the entire speakers of EkeGusii. The words were compared with the Dholuo equivalents for similarity in form, pronunciation and meaning. The study used the Linguistic Interference Theory. The theory considers borrowing as interference with the recipient language as it introduces foreign linguistic items and other linguistic features. The linguistic items were analysed in relation to the phonemic inventories and phonemic properties of the two languages. The findings proved that there is borrowing of a number of core vocabulary and frequently-used words between the two linguistic communities. The findings, however, did not establish why the core vocabulary and the frequently-used words would be borrowed by a speech community which has the said words in their basic lexicon already. The finding is critical considering the assertion in the literature that the words under study are resistant to borrowing. Further study is recommended to establish why a linguistic community would borrow words which it already has and are in active everyday use.

Keywords: Core Vocabulary, Dholuo, Domains, Ekegusii, Frequently-Used Words, Phylogenetic Relationship

I. INTRODUCTION

The research work is about two linguistic communities: the Luo and the Aba-Gusii. The Luo are a Nilotic community whose origin is believed to be Southern Sudan while the Aba-Gusii are a Bantu community whose origin is said to be Central Africa (Orawo, 2024). The two communities speak Dholuo and EkeGusii, respectively. The languages are not genetically related as they belong to two differently distinct language families. The two speech communities are contiguous to each other. They have been in contact for a period of at least 400 years (Ndeda, 2019). Considering the long period of contiguity, lexical borrowing is inevitable due to social interaction such as trade, marriage and even conflicts. The study wished to establish if the lexical borrowing included core vocabulary. Core vocabulary are linguistic items that accompany human beings independently of their specific environment (Matras, 2009). These words resist



borrowing, as attested to by several linguists. Hock and Joseph (2009, p.435) state that, 'borrowing tends to be limited to certain spheres of the lexicon and it has the least effect on basic vocabulary'.

Core vocabulary are words which belong to certain specific domains. The domains include: names of body parts such as head, eyes; terms for close kin such as father, uncle; bodily functions such as breathing, excretion; basic concepts for nature and geography such as mountains, rivers, sun, moon. Since these concepts and objects exist in every human community there should not be need to borrow the words that refer to them from languages of neighbouring communities. The basic vocabulary also include frequently-used words. The frequently-used words are those lexical items which are stable because of their high frequency in everyday use.

Dholuo is the language spoken by the Luo people, it belongs to the Nilotic family of languages. The Luo people are found in Kenya and northern Tanzania. They occupy parts of the eastern and southern shores of Lake Victoria. Dholuo shares linguistic similarities with other languages in that family, such as Acholi and Lango spoken in Uganda and South Sudan (Mbogho et al., 2025). Dholuo is mutually intelligible (in varying degrees) with Alur, Acholi, Adhola and Lang'o of Uganda. The languages are linguistically related to Dholuo of South Sudan and Anuak of Ethiopia. Historians indicate that their cradle land is along the rivers Sue and Jur in Bahr-el-ghazal province in Sudan (Ochieng', 1985, p.35). From their cradle land in Bahr-el-ghazal in southern Sudan, the Luo moved into northern and eastern Uganda and then entered Kenya. The other sister languages were left in Sudan and Uganda (Ochieng', 1990). The Luo then settled in the areas they occupy today between the years of 1500 and 1550 A.D. The speakers of Dholuo occupy Siaya, Kisumu, Homa-Bay and Migori counties.

The Aba-Gusii are said to have migrated from their cradleland in the 'North' which they say is known as 'Misri' (Bichaine, 2017). Other scholars of history (Ndeda, 2019) explain that their cradleland is in the Congo Basin from where they migrated to Kenya through Uganda. There seems to be some evidence in the latter considering the genetic relationship between EkeGusii on one hand and Logooli, Egekuria and Olusuba on the other hand. If the Maragoli, the Abakuria and the Suba all originated from the Congo Basin, then it can be logically reasoned that the cradleland was a common place given the relationship between the languages. It would be far-fetched to imagine a language relationship for two speech communities whose places of origin are as separate as the Congo Basin and Egypt.

According to Beale-Rivaya (2023), EkeGusii is a Bantu language spoken by the Aba-Gusii (the people of Gusii) who reside in Kisii and Nyamira counties. Cammenga (2002) indicates that EkeGusii is an Eastern Nyanza Bantu language spoken in the northern part of the region between the eastern shore of Lake Victoria and the eastern branch of the Great Rift Valley. The prefix *eke-* in Eke-Gusii is a singular noun class prefix in the EkeGusii noun classification system. It can function as a diminutive marker or a general noun class prefix (Ombati, 2021). As a general noun class prefix, and when used in this context, it denotes language as in Ege-Songo (English language), Eke-Gere (Luo language), Eke-Maasai (Maa language) and so on. The prefix *aba-* in Aba-Gusii means 'people of'. Aba-Gusii is 'the people of Gusii'. Mogusii (son of Osogo) is said to be the ancestor of the Aba-Gusii which is perhaps where the community got the name from (Aberi, 2009). The migration led the community southwards and they first settled around Mount Elgon, from where they moved and settled on the eastern shores of Lake Victoria. It was at this point that they had their first contact with the Luo people.

The Abagusii and Luo contact dates back to the eighteenth century when the Abagusii settled along the eastern shores of Lake Victoria (then known as *Nam Lolwe*). They came under attack from the Luo community. They then moved slightly southwards and settled in Sakwa, Asembo, Seme and Kisumu at around 1640 to 1755 (Bichaine, 2017). So long is the contact period that Otiso (2017) says that part of the Abagusii female naming system is influenced by the contact with the Luo during the migration of the Abagusii from the Luo-occupied territories. She explains that the names Kemunto, Kwamboka, Kerubo, and Moraa can be traced to the Luo contact and influence. Kemunto is derived from the noun *ekemunto*, meaning gulf (specifically Kavirondo gulf). These were girls who were born when the Abagusii community was around the Kavirondo gulf of Lake Victoria. Kwamboka was given to the girls born when the community was crossing the Kavirondo gulf. Kwamboka means 'to cross over a water body'. Kerubo originates from the word 'ekerubo', which means a flat area with water (swamp). This name was given to girls born when the Abagusii reached the Kano plains. The name Moraa is derived from *emeraa*, which is a type of shrub. It is not clear why male names are not associated with the migration process. However, that is an anthropological issue that is non-linguistic and was not pursued in the study.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

All languages change through time. Word borrowing is one of the most common causes of linguistic change especially in contact situations. Whenever there is such contact speech communities involved in the interaction get to adopt certain linguistic features from one another. Dholuo and EkeGusii have been in contact for over four hundred years. Core vocabulary and frequently-used words are resistant to borrowing. The study sought to establish if core vocabulary and frequently-used words have been borrowed across the two phylogenetically unrelated speech communities.



1.2 Research Objectives

- i. To establish if core vocabulary and frequently-used words have been borrowed between Dholuo and EkeGusii,
- ii. To illustrate the phonological and morphological differences of the borrowed core vocabulary items and the frequently-used words.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

The research work can be understood against the theory of Linguistic Interference (Thomason & Kaufman, 2001). The theory addresses the sociolinguistic history of the speakers as the primary determinant of the linguistic outcome of language contact. Linguistic Interference is conditioned by social factors, the direction of interference and the extent of interference are socially determined, and the kinds of features transferred from one language to another. Linguistic interference is a complex phenomenon within the study of linguistics and even transcends to other disciplines such as psychology, pedagogy, and cultural studies. The study pursued the strand of Interaction of Languages as a factor in linguistic interference (Baghana et al, 2018).

2.1.1 Tenets of the Theory

The four issues the theory addresses are evident in the Dholuo and EkeGusii contact situation due to many years of contact and sociolinguistic interaction brought about by social factors such as trade, intermarriage, and disputes leading to war and skirmishes. Skirmishes between the Luo and the Abagusii are still sporadic today. The study particularly pursued the borrowing of linguistic elements, interlingual identification of language features where a speaker of one language assumes (erroneously) that the features as articulated are similar to the ones in the donor language, interference at the phonetic and phonological levels and morphological levels.

The direction of borrowing is likely to be influenced by trade and dominance. Trade can influence the direction of borrowing in situations where one community happens to have more goods to sell to the other. The speech communities selling are likely to learn the language of the buyers so as to gain leverage in trade. This is even more so if the selling community has to travel to the territory of the buyers in order to sell. Such situations may lead to linguistic dominance of one speech community over the other. Linguistic dominance could also be due to the numerical advantage of the Luo over the Abagusii. The Kenya National Bureau of Statistics data on population indicates that the Luo have been more numerous than the Abagusii over the years. Even though data on population figures is not available for the period before 1969, one can posit that even in the pre-census period, there were more Luo people than the Abagusii.

Second, there are certain morphological features in the common forms which may be characteristic of either EkeGusii or Dholuo but never both. Borrowings are often morphologically and semantically unanalysed in the receiving language, that is, a particular borrowed word may be broken into morphemes, with each morpheme carrying a particular meaning in the donor language. However, in the receiving language, such an analysis may not be possible. The research analysed the morphological and phonological features in order to establish the direction of borrowing. Some features exist in both languages. Such features are transferable, and then there are those that are not. The study analysed the features transferred from one linguistic community to the other.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 The Concept of Borrowing

The word 'borrowing' has been a subject of discourse by a number of scholars in the field of language contact. Linguistic borrowing, which is also known as language borrowing or lexical borrowing, is the process by which words, phrases, or grammatical structures from one language are adopted into another language as a result of contact (Sarah, 2025). Borrowing is the introduction of a word or a linguistic feature from one language or dialect to a different language or dialect (Crystal, 1987). Bynon (1977) defines borrowing as the transfer of lexical materials across language boundaries. Haugen (1950) opines that the term 'borrowing' is a misnomer as it is semantically inaccurate. The word 'borrowing' suggests that the linguistic items should be returned to the donor language at some later point in time. It also implies that the donor language does not use the word for the 'duration' it is 'lent' (Hockett, 1958; Weinreich, 1979; Knappert, 1970; Asher & Sympson, 1994). Hoffer (2002) describes the term 'borrowing' as misleading since borrowing takes place without the consent of the lender and need not be repaid.

2.2.2 Borrowing of Core Vocabulary and Frequently-Used Words

Linguists are invariably in agreement that core vocabulary and frequently-used words are more resistant to borrowing than peripheral 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. Myers-Scotton (2002) argues that 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) 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.

The most important fact is that different spheres of the vocabulary are borrowed more easily, others less easily. 'The most successful resistance to borrowing is offered by basic vocabulary' (Hock, 2009:245). He identifies basic vocabulary as words referring to the most essential human activities and needs such as 'eat', 'sleep', and function words which are essential in syntax such demonstrative pronouns, and conjunctions. Arlotto (1972), Hock (2009), Crowley and Bower (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. Words which fall within the domain of core vocabulary tend to be 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), (Arlotto, 1972).

Anttila (2009:397) adds the following to the list of core vocabulary items: pronouns and basic actions. He explains that 'basic core vocabulary is very valuable in giving a quick elicitation list for those items where loans are least likely, and thus one can start comparative work conveniently from here'. Crowley and Bower (2010:206) explains that 'languages are likely to copy words from other languages in the area of cultural vocabulary than core vocabulary'. When cultural items get to a community that did not have them, their names are borrowed as well. Crowley and Bower (2010) describes core vocabulary as vocabulary that we expect to find in all human languages. It is difficult to imagine any language that does not have some way of expressing meanings like *cry, walk, sleep, eat, stone*. Cultural vocabulary refers to meanings which are culture-specific, which people learn through the experience of their own culture. Culture-specific words are not core vocabulary because the words are only relevant within the specific speech communities. Anttila (2009) says that some items of the vocabulary are better preserved than others: lower numerals, pronouns, body parts, natural objects, basic actions, and so on. These items are referred to as the basic core vocabulary. Basic core vocabulary is very valuable in giving elicitation for those items where loans are least likely.

Campbell (2013), states that most scholars insist that basic vocabulary be part of the supporting evidence in favour of distant family relationship. Basic vocabulary is usually not defined rigorously but is understood generally to include terms for body parts, close kinship, frequently encountered aspects of the natural world (mountain, river, cloud and the like) and low numbers, which vocabulary he asserts is resistant to borrowing. Dimmendaal (2011) states that fundamental vocabulary is rarely borrowed and even wonders why one would want to borrow words for concepts that are known to the speech community. Matras (2009) is of a similar view that some concepts 'represent objects or ideas that accompany human beings independently of their specific environment'. The objects or ideas are not dependent on any environment. These include: names of body parts, close kin, body-related activities, basic concepts for nature and geography.

Since these concepts exist in every human community there should not be need to borrow the words that refer to them from languages of neighbouring communities. Bates (2002), says that Rasmus Rask helped solve a linguistic problem by using the principle that languages tend to resist borrowing related to certain areas of life. Deeply religious material tends to be transmitted in original form. The Norman Conquest in the 11th century led to a drastic change in England's linguistic landscape. The French influence on English is most pronounced in the vocabulary in the areas of government, law, military, art, literature and food. In fact, Hock (2009:245) mentions that 'in spite of its pervasive and domineering influence, French contributed virtually nothing to the most basic vocabulary' of English. The statement underscores the stability of core vocabulary against borrowing. Hogg and Fulk (1995) states that languages borrow only if there is a linguistic need for doing so. For instance, a language may borrow a term designating an item if the vocabulary does not have a corresponding term. He argues that no natural language is deficient. Every language is adequate for use in every speech community. Whenever necessary, the meaning of a word may be 'stretched' to fulfil new roles. This argument by Hogg and Fulk holds true for both core vocabulary and frequently-used words.

Wohlgemuth (2009:8) addresses the 'limits of borrowability' either globally or for any pair of languages. He explains that there are shared forms that are considered 'unborrowable'. Such shared forms are indicative of genealogical relatedness rather than language contact. There are two fundamental claims about the limits of borrowing and/or borrowability which is found throughout the literature on this topic. The first claim is grounded in semantics and addresses the non-borrowability of basic (core) vocabulary, or at least its strong resistance to be borrowed. Core vocabulary is 'too salient to be easily replaced'. The second claim suggests relative difficulty to borrow from lexical classes other than nouns. This difficulty is assumed to be inherent to the categories such as *verb, adjective, adposition*. In addition to having meaning, words also have a pointing function commonly referred to as deixis (Meyer, 2009). Deixis is used to point to things, locations, and time. Yule (1996:9) explains that deixis is 'pointing' via language. Any



linguistic form used to ‘point’ is called a deictic expression. It is one of the most basic things humans do with utterances. To underscore how basic and core these vocabulary items are, he explains that ‘they are among the first forms to be spoken by very young children’.

2.2.3 Borrowing and Adaptation

The concept of borrowing and the resultant adaptation and integration have been studied by scholars such as Haugen (1950) and Haspelmath (2008). Loanwords often undergo changes to make them fit into the recipient language. These changes are called loanword adaptation or loanword integration (Haspelmath, 2009). They consider lexical borrowing as involving the process of integration of the borrowed lexical items into the recipient language. The extent of the integration may vary, the determining factor being the extent to which the borrowed lexical items get adapted or integrated into the recipient language. Spahiu and Nuredini (2023) defines adaptation as ‘the changes that occur when... words are adopted into another language.’ The changes in pronunciation and meaning. Haspelmath and Tadmor (2009) draw the distinction between *adaptation* and *adoption* of loanwords as follows:

Adaptation is the phonological and/or morphological changes loanwords undergo to make them fit better into the recipient language. The word is modified to fit into the new linguistic environment. For example, *television* was borrowed into Kiswahili as *televisheni*. This is because Kiswahili is a vowel-final language and any consonant-final word entering Kiswahili takes that modification. Adoption is the incorporation of foreign elements into the speaker’s native language. They use it as a synonym for borrowing (Haspelmath & Tadmor, 2009). The word gets into the recipient language with the features which may be foreign to the language. For example, *computer* was borrowed into Kiswahili as *kompyuta*.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Study Area

The study was conducted in Kisii and Nyamira counties, which together constitute Gusiiland. Although speakers of EkeGusii are found in different parts of Kenya and abroad, the highest concentration of speakers resides in these two counties, which are regarded as the homeland of the Abagusii community. The study also covered selected areas of Luo land, namely Migori, Homa Bay, and Kisumu counties, where native speakers of Dholuo were consulted to validate the lexical items used in the study.

3.2 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design. The design was appropriate because it enabled the researcher to explore lexical correspondences and semantic relationships between EkeGusii and Dholuo through detailed linguistic elicitation. Data were collected using a structured lexical elicitation schedule based on the Swadesh List and supplemented with open-ended interviews where clarification was required. Purposive sampling was used to identify respondents who met the inclusion criteria and possessed the linguistic competence necessary to provide reliable lexical data. The qualitative design facilitated an in-depth examination of language use, lexical variation, and cultural meanings.

3.3 Target Population

The target population comprised native speakers of EkeGusii residing in Kisii and Nyamira counties as well as native speakers of Dholuo from Migori, Homa Bay, and Kisumu counties. Eligible participants were individuals aged 20 years and above who had attained at least secondary school education. This criterion was adopted to ensure that respondents possessed adequate language competence and maturity to provide reliable information on lexical usage and cultural practices.

3.4 Sample Size

Qualitative sample size is determined by the depth and richness of the information required rather than by statistical representativeness. The adequacy of a qualitative sample depends on the study objectives, the characteristics of the target population, and the point at which data saturation is achieved (Yang, 2022). Data saturation occurs when additional participants no longer contribute new information or perspectives (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Studies have shown that saturation in relatively homogeneous populations is commonly achieved between 9 and 17 interviews, with an average of approximately 12 to 13 participants (Hennink, 2022).

Guided by these recommendations, the researcher purposively selected 96 participants, comprising 48 respondents from Kisii County and 48 respondents from Nyamira County. The sample included equal representation of male and female participants and covered four age categories: 20–29 years, 30–39 years, 40–49 years, and 50 years and above. This diversity enabled the researcher to capture possible variations in lexical usage across gender and age groups while ensuring sufficient depth for qualitative analysis.



3.5 Data Collection Instrument

Data were collected using a structured lexical elicitation schedule comprising 218 words drawn from the Swadesh List of core vocabulary. The lexical items were translated into Dholuo by the researcher, who is a native speaker of the language. To ensure linguistic accuracy and minimize researcher bias, the Dholuo translations were independently validated by native speakers from Migori, Homa Bay, and Kisumu counties. Speakers from Siaya County were not included in the validation process because the Boro-Ukwala dialect differs from the standard Dholuo variety adopted in this study.

Participants were requested to provide the corresponding EkeGusii equivalents for each lexical item. Space was provided for respondents to record alternative lexical forms or synonyms where multiple equivalents existed. Where necessary, follow-up interviews were conducted to clarify meanings and contextual usage. The collected lexical data were analysed using visual, phonological, and semantic comparison to identify genuine cognates and distinguish them from false cognates, which may appear similar despite having different meanings (Visola, 2024; Marecka et al., 2021).

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were observed throughout the study. The well-being, dignity, and rights of participants were prioritized during all stages of the research process. Informed consent was obtained from every participant after the researcher explained the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the intended use of the data. Participants were informed that they could decline participation or withdraw from the study at any stage without any negative consequences (Mirza, 2023; VandeVusse, 2021).

Consistent with established ethical principles, no information was collected without the knowledge and consent of participants (Bailey, 1978; Kumar, 1999). A research licence was obtained from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI), which authorizes research activities in Kenya. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by ensuring that participants' identities were not disclosed in any reports arising from the study. The researcher further upheld integrity by minimizing bias, applying appropriate qualitative research procedures, and ensuring that the collected data were used solely for academic purposes (Kumar, 1999).

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings

The analyses of the data showed that there were several words which fall within the domains of core vocabulary and frequently-used words. The words have near similar forms (visual aspect) and pronunciation (acoustic aspect), and similar meaning (semantic aspect).

4.1.1 Universal Terms

Dholuo	EkeGusii	Gloss
Nyasaye	Nyasae	'God'
jachien	enyachieni	'devil'
ruoth	omoruoti	'prominent person'
thuon	etuoni	'hero/cock'
got	egoti	'mountain/hill'
buru	eburu	'dust'
olalo	oboraro	'bridge'
atonga	egetonga	'basket'
ngori	e-ngori	'rope'
turi	e-turi	'heap'
ten	egeteni	'traditional low stool'
loch	ekerochi	'peg'
kunyo	kunya	'dig'
ngima	engima	'life'
ogenga	ekegenga	'log fire'
soko	ensoko	'well'
tich	tichi	'work'
siro	e-siro	'support'
oganda	omoganda	'crowd'
chandruok	omochando	'problems'
otenga	ogotenga	'dance'
sigana	omogano	'story/tale'

4.1.2 Frequently- used Words

konya	enkonye	‘help me’
muma	e-muma	‘The Holy Bible’
bando	ebando	‘maize’
pako	baka	‘praise’
hinyo	okoinya	‘hurt’
baro	okobarora	‘split’
chako	ogochaka	‘start’
go abal	goaka opari	‘swim’
boyo	okoboa	‘wrap’
konya	ogokonya	‘help’
nyoyo	chinyoyo/chiyoyo	‘succotash’
Tich ariyo	Tichi kabere	‘Tuesday’
mino	okomino	‘weave’
odheru	oroteru	‘traditional tray’
beti	e-beti	‘panga’
chiro	e-chiro	‘market’
rabuon	rirabuoni	‘potato’
pundo	epundo	‘ochre’
osaklo	risako	‘husk’
agulu	ekeguru	‘pot’
okumba	enkumba	‘shield’
oseke	orokore	‘straw’
ogoro	obogoro	‘tobacco’
ooro	obooro	‘left over ugali’
misumba	omosomba	‘bachelor/servant’
ochuri	ochuri	‘digested food in an animal’s small intestines’
oriri	oborere	‘traditional bed’
mwandu	omwandu	‘wealth’
kwesi	ekebwesi	‘pipe’
oduma	egetuma	‘maize’
nanga	eyanga	‘cloth’
ngori	engori	‘heavy duty rope’
kede	egete	‘stick’
chayo	ogochaya	‘despise’
ka	iga	‘here’

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 The Morphological Structure of EkeGusii Noun

The morphological structure analysis of EkeGusii nouns can be explained and understood against the categories in which the nouns fall. EkeGusii nouns, unlike Dholuo, have an elaborate morphological structure that fall into distinct nominal classes determined by their prefixes and semantic content (Hendrikse & Poulos, 1992).

Table 1: Morphological frame of EkeGusii noun

PREFIX		ROOT	
Pre-prefix	Prefix	Root	Final vowel
<i>o-</i>	<i>-mo-</i>	<i>-ruot</i>	<i>-i</i>
augment	noun class marker	root and final vowel	

The Dholuo word *ruoth* and the EkeGusii equivalent *omoruoti* would map onto the morphological frame structure as follows. Dholuo *ruoth* and EkeGusii *omoruoti* ‘chief/important person’. The differences in pronunciation (acoustic aspect) are analysed as follows: *ruoth* and *omoruoti* share the same root. A root is the irreducible base of a word. In Dholuo, it is a free root. In EkeGusii, however, it occurs within a more complex nominal structure that requires noun class marking. Unlike EkeGusii, Dholuo nouns do not have noun classes. In EkeGusii, the noun class marker prefix *omo-* is attached to the root of the word. While Dholuo phonemic inventory has the voiceless dental fricative *th* /θ/, EkeGusii does not. EkeGusii speakers therefore replace the voiceless dental fricative *th* /θ/ with the voiceless alveolar



stop *t* /t/. Dholuo phonology accepts consonant-final words. EkeGusii does not. EkeGusii speakers insert a final vowel sound *i* /i/. The same argument holds for the following data set where the root of the word is adapted to the requirements of the different nominal classes in EkeGusii.

Dholuo	EkeGusii
jachien	e-nyachien-i
ruoth	omo-ruot-i
thuong	e-tuong-i
got	e-got-i
buru	e-buru
atonga	ege-tonga
ngori	e-ngori
turi	e-turi

The above data is in line with the position of Haspelmath (2009) that borrowed lexical items undergo morphological and phonological adaptation in the recipient language. The following data set presents evidence that there are certain morphological features in the common forms which may be characteristic of either EkeGusii or Dholuo but never both.

Dholuo	EkeGusii
odheru	oro-teru
thuong	e-tuong-i
ruoth	omo-ruot-i

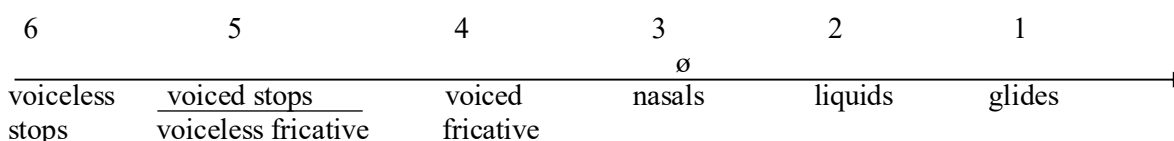
Both the voiced dental fricative /ð/ and the voiceless dental fricative /θ/ in Dholuo are both replaced by the voiceless alveolar stop /t/. The following data set presents frequently-used words.

Dholuo	EkeGusii	gloss
kede	e-gete	'stick'
chayo	ogo-chaya	'despise'
nanga	e-yanga	'cloth'
agulu	eke-guru	'pot'
konya	ogo-konya	'help'

The words are those which are in active everyday use, including the verb 'help' which is considered an example of a basic word needed for survival and to seek for assistance. According to Hock (2009), no natural language is deficient. It is inconceivable that a natural language such as EkeGusii or Dholuo would have to borrow such a word because they do not have a word for the concept.

Dholuo	EkeGusii	gloss
ka	iga	'here'

The deictic element *ka* and *iga* for Dholuo and EkeGusii respectively is a core vocabulary item (Yule, 2004). The slight difference in the visual and acoustic aspects can be accounted for as follows: The Principle of Least Effort theory - according to the principle, language changes due to the fact that speakers are 'sloppy' and prefer to simplify their speech. Examples of lenition consist of voiceless stops becoming voiced (Alkazwini, 2017). Consequently, the voiceless velar stop /k/ changes to the velar fricative /ɣ/. A graphic representation of the lenition trajectory is shown as below.



The initial vowel is consistent with many EkeGusii words beginning with vowel sounds. The core vocabulary and the frequently-used words listed meet the three parameters of form (visual aspect), pronunciation (acoustic aspect) and meaning. The pronunciation may, however, show some differences because Eke-Gusii nouns belong to specific



classes. These classes have fixed prefixes that are attached to the root. A borrowed word into Eke-Gusii is nativized by adding a noun prefix to it. For instance, a Kiswahili word *taa* 'lamp' is nativized as *etaya*.

A second reason which could cause differences in pronunciation is differences in the phonemic inventories of the two languages. There are certain speech sounds which are in the Dholuo phonemic inventory but not in the EkeGusii one. For instance, the voiceless bilabial plosive /p/ which is available in the Dholuo speech sounds is not available in the EkeGusii one. Similarly, the bilabial fricative /β/ in the EkeGusii speech sound is not available in the Dholuo speech sounds. The third reason is due to consonant cluster acceptance. Dholuo accepts consonant clusters while EkeGusii phonology does not. Whenever an EkeGusii speaker encounters a borrowed word with consonant clusters, the cluster gets broken by inserting a vowel sound. Fourthly, while Dholuo accepts both open and closed syllables, EkeGusii does not accept closed syllables. Subsequently, a borrowed word which is consonant final would have a vowel sound attached at the end. The same analyses apply to *chiro* and *echiro* 'market', *got* and *egoti* 'mountain or hill'. The only difference here being the class marker prefix. The rest of the sounds are available in both languages. Both words are vowel final and so there is no change as both languages accept vowel final words.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 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 study did not delve into which speech community borrowed from the other. The study was concluded by making reference to the Theory of Linguistic Interference. Most of the words borrowed had differences in acoustic aspect which were accounted for by analysing the differences in the phonemic inventories of the two languages. Some words retained the exact acoustic aspect in the two languages. An example is *ochuri* 'digested food in the small intestines of a cow, goat or sheep'.

The study did not strive to establish 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 in the literature. The closest it gets to reasons for borrowing is perhaps borrowing for prestige or due to 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. Finally, the study established that core vocabulary and frequently-used words are susceptible to borrowing in contact situations just like any other peripheral vocabulary.

5.2 Recommendations

It would be fulfilling to establish why a linguistic community should be interested in borrowing words which they 'do not need'. Further research is needed to find out why intense contact in dominance situations like the English and Norman scenario did not include core vocabulary and frequently-used words.

Declaration of Interest

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