

## **Borrowing and Communication in Language: The Impact of Morphological Adaptation Processes**

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### **Abstract**

Languages borrow primarily to communicate; borrowing, therefore, occurs out of necessity or need where a language does not have a readily available word for something. Other reasons for borrowing include prestige and foreign influence. Borrowing occurs when speakers of a given language have had some contact with another/other language(s). Usually, borrowed words appear as similar as possible to the source words while at the same time adopting the morphology of the recipient language. In all cases though, borrowing denotes language growth which enhances communication and is continuous. This paper argues that while borrowed words are similar to the source words, they morphologically apply strategies that make them have the structure of the recipient language for ease of communication. Such strategies include: prefixation, suffixation, substitution, zero transmorphemisation and substitution of the prefix. To exemplify this, the paper uses words borrowed from English and Kiswahili into Kikuyu language. Kikuyu language has had a long contact with these two languages.

**Key words:** Borrowing, adaptation, communication, prefixation, suffixation, substitution, source-similarity, morphological.

### **1.0 Introduction**

This paper focuses on the morphological adaptation processes that take place when languages borrow words. It shows that when such processes occur, ease of articulation is achieved by the recipient language and this enables language users to communicate in a manner acceptable to their language. In order to do an analysis of its data, the paper adopts the Source-Similarity approach which is one brand of optimality theories. Further, to exemplify the morphological adaptation processes, the paper uses Gĩkũyũ words that are borrowed from English and Kiswahili. Iribemwangi (2012) states that Gĩkũyũ language has five dialects. Of the five, this study picks Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ as the dialect of analysis. This dialect is chosen primarily because of two reasons. Firstly, among all the Gĩkũyũ dialects, it is the one that has received least academic attention. Secondly, in terms of

phonological and morphological features, it is quite different from the other Gĩkũyũ dialects (Wacera: 2008). Consequently, this paper explores how English and Kiswahili loanwords are adapted morphologically into the Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ dialect of Gĩkũyũ language. The main focus is on examining how loanwords are fitted into Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ nominal classes through affixation process<sup>1</sup> to enhance communication.

Morphologically, the Gĩkũyũ noun consists of a class prefix and a stem (and also a terminal vowel in the case of derivatives). The prefix designates the class membership. As Karuru (2013) notes, being a Bantu language, Gĩkũyũ has seventeen noun classes. Most loanwords in languages are nouns and so is the case in Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ dialect. As is always the case, all nouns in the dialect are placed in a particular class as shown below. When the borrowed lexical items undergo morphological adaptation process, then they fit into a given class and therefore enable delivery of grammatically correct communication.

Semantically, Classes 1/2 include nouns denoting human beings and human attributes.<sup>2</sup> Classes 3/4 are impersonal nouns which include nouns denoting trees, plants, diseases and other things that take {Mo-} as singular prefix and {Me-} as the plural prefix. In classes 3/4 also are found nouns representing the body and some of its parts. Classes 5/6 consists of nouns referring to geographical features, inanimate objects, nouns denoting one in a pair, nouns with religious connotations and mass nouns among others. Classes 7/8 consist of inanimate objects, be they man-made or natural. Classes 9 /10 consist of abstract nouns, objects, names of animals and creatures. According to Benson (1964) and Barlow (1975), the majority of loanwords in most languages (80%), have been placed in noun classes 9/10 (the classes that carry the zero prefix). Classes 11/10 on the other hand denote inanimate objects, geographical features and parts of the body. Classes 12/13 are nouns which denote the diminutive forms of things. Classes 14/6 consist of abstract nouns which are not pluralized; classes 15/6 are nouns that denote a pair while classes 16/17 are nouns that denote places.

### 1.1 Definition of Terms and Affixation

Smeaton (1973: 83) asserts that a loanword undergoes modification of morphological structure to achieve harmony with the predominance pattern and the root system of the recipient language. This is adaptation. On his part, Crystal (1991) states that the morphological process in which grammatical and lexical information is added to a stem is known as affixation. Fromkin and Rodman (1988:131) define affixation as a process in which prefixes, infixes and suffixes are conjoined to other morphemes to form words. When this happens in a language, it makes it easy for language users to communicate naturally.

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<sup>1</sup> Gĩkũyũ being an agglutinating language, the main affixation process are prefixation and suffixation. Infixes are not found in the language.

<sup>2</sup> It is noted that the list given concerning the membership of various noun classes is by no means exhaustive. There are many more shades of meanings in various classes and this research only notes the main ones.

Morphologically, in Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ as with other languages, the first morpheme - the prefix -generally indicates the class to which a given noun belongs. A pair of prefixes comprising singular and plural represents one class of nouns. In Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ, prefixes and suffixes can be used to derive a noun from other grammatical categories like verbs and adjectives. Plural forms are derived from singular forms through prefixation as per the Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ noun classes. In nouns loaned from English, a vowel is inserted in the word final through suffixation so as to correspond to the Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ syllable structure for natural communication.

## 2.0 Results and Discussion

In this section, this paper will undertake an analysis of some borrowed vocabulary which has been morphologically adapted into Gĩkũyũ. From the analysis, it will be clear that the adapted words acquire the structure of Gĩkũyũ words and therefore enable communication to occur with ease. In the discussion therefore, the paper will explore the morphological processes and affixations that occur. The Gĩkũyũ borrowed words explored have their source languages as English and Kiswahili. The morphological processes discussed are prefixation, substitution, suffixation and zero transmorphemisation.

### 2.1 Morphological Adaptation of Words Borrowed from English to Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ

As already alluded to in 2.0 above, words borrowed from English to Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ dialect exhibit various morphological processes. In its discussion, this paper will use three main processes below to exemplify.

#### 2.1.1 Prefixation

Prefixation involves the addition of a morpheme at the initial position of a stem or root. In Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ, the plural morpheme is marked in the prefixes only. As earlier stated in section 1.1, the prefix also indicates the class to which a noun belongs. In his study of Bantu phonology and morphology, Mati (2006) indicates that for most noun classes, there exists a regular association of pairs to show the singular / plural dichotomy. In Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ, the plural morphemes are placed before the root of the noun, for example:

(1)

Singular	Plural	Gloss
mũ+tũar+i = mũ+twari	a+tũari+i = a+ twari	a driver/drivers
mũ+rĩm+i = mũ+rĩmi	a+rĩm+i = a+rĩmi	farmer/farmers
mũ+ic+i = mũ+ici	a+ic+i = a+ici	a thief/thieves

From the data in (1), it is noted that the class prefixes such as {mũ – a} act as both pluralizing morphemes as well as noun class markers in Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ. It is also worth noting that the final vowels in the examples above play the role of indicating the type of noun. The type indicated in this case is agentive noun. As is evident, prefixes in Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ also mark number.

Fromkin (1988) states that there are morphological rules that determine how morphemes combine to form new words; therefore, loanwords have to be assigned respective Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ noun classes to conform to the morphological rules and hence fit in Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ noun class system. Borrowed words from English can be analysed as follows in relation to how they are fitted in Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ noun classes.

(2)

<b>Noun</b>	<b>Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>	<b>Gloss</b>
/b k/	/ e-βuku /	/ ma- βuku /	book/books
/afis/	/ɔ-βisi/	/ma-ɔβisi/	office/offices
/daktər/	/nda-ɾetare/	/ma-ndaɾetare/	doctor/doctors
/sku:l/	/su-kuru/	/ma-sukuru/	school/schools
/tænk/	/e-taŋgi/	/ma-taŋgi/	tank/tanks

From data (2), the nouns indicated are from diverse Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ noun classes. This therefore explains the difference in the singular prefixes. However, the plural prefix {ma-} is similar in all the nouns. The singular prefix taken by Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ speaker in the adaptation process dictates the plural suffix that the noun takes. This allows the adapted word to fit in the Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ morphological noun classes and hence allow for grammatically correct communication.

At times, nouns in some Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ nominal classes take a similar singular prefix and a similar plural prefix. This is the case in classes 3/4 where the singular prefix is {mo-} and the plural prefix is {me-}. These are classes which consist of names of trees and a variety of inanimate things. Examples of loan words adapted in these classes are:

(3)

<b>Singular</b>	<b>Plural</b>	<b>Gloss</b>
/mo-te/	/me-te/	a tree/ trees
/mo-sikiri/	/me-sikiri/	bicycle/ bicycles
/mo-rɛŋgɛti/	/me-rɛŋgɛti/	blanket/ blankets

As noted earlier in section 1.0, the bulk of English loanwords are assigned to noun classes 9/10. These classes take the names of animals and miscellanea. The classes are marked by a zero class prefix. In these classes, the singular and plural forms of a word is marked by a zero morph - {∅} - and is therefore not apparent in the surface form. Examples of loanwords from English in these classes include words in (4) below:

(4)

<b>Underlying</b>	<b>Surface Singular</b>	<b>Surface Plural</b>	<b>Gloss/Source</b>
/∅+kandi/	[kandi]	[kandi]	card/cards
/∅-ndasi/	[ndasi]	[ndasi]	dance/dances
/∅+nɲanɲi/	[nɲanɲi]	[nɲanɲi]	judge/judges
/∅+mita/	[mita]	[mita]	metre/metres
/∅+nɲakɛti/	[nɲakɛti]	[nɲakɛti]	jacket/jackets
/∅+mbaði/	[mbaði]	[mbaði]	bus/buses
/∅+ŋgita/	[ŋgita]	/ŋgita]	guitar/guitars
/∅+ðuβu/	[ðuβu]	[ðuβu]	soup/soups
/∅+đuti/	[đuti]	[đuti]	suit/suits

Some other loanwords borrowed from English are adjusted so as to become diminutive nouns that would fit in Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ noun classes 12/13. This is where a noun is changed from its ordinary size to a diminutive form by the addition of prefixes {ga-} (which is also realized as {ka-}) for the singular form and {to-} for the plural form. Things held with contempt are also placed in this class to belittle them and make them appear unimportant or non-consequential. It is noted that such class forms do not exist in English but in order to allow for natural communication in recipient language; then this class is introduced in the adaptation process. Examples of such loanwords are illustrated in (5) below:

(5)

Ordinary size	Singular (diminutive)	Plural (diminutive)	Gloss (Ordinary)
/ø+ɔβisi/	/ka-ɔβisi/	/to-ɔβisi/	office
/ø+mbaði/	/ka-βaði/	/to-βaði/	bus
/ø+njaɾi/	/ka-njaɾi/	/to-njaɾi/	jug
/ø+ðuti/	/ka-ðuti/	/to-ðuti/	suit
/ø+etaŋgi/	/ga-taŋgi/	/to-taŋgi/	tank
/ø+sikati/	/ga-sikati/	/to-sikati/	skirt

It is evident from data 2 to 5 above that English loanwords are adapted into Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ morphologically through prefixation to allow them fit in the noun classes. Such adaptation clearly allows for natural communication.

### 2.1.2 Suffixation

Another adaptation process applied to words borrowed from English into Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ is suffixation. Crystal (1991) defines suffixation as a term used in morphology referring to an affix which is added following a root or stem. He further notes that the process of suffixation is common in English for derivational formation of new lexical items. Kinuthia (2008) refers to suffixation as morphological insertion where it refers to the addition of a class prefix marker and a nominalizing affix to the verb root of the derived nouns.

When English words are borrowed into Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ, a vowel is inserted at word final. However, in the case of such insertion in Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ, the nouns are not a product of derivational process. In such a case, the vowel found at the end of a root of loanword from English is just meant to create a morphological structure that is acceptable in communication using Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ and is not a result of nominalization. Examples are as indicated in (6) below:

(6)

English	Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ	Gloss
/mænɪdʒər/	/manenɟ-a/	manager
/b k/	/e-βuk-u/	book
/glæs/	/ŋgirað-i/	glass
/bʌs/	/mbað-i/	bus
/su:p/	/ðuβ-u/	soup
/bæg/	/mbaɣ-i/	bag

### 2.1.3 Substitution

The initial syllable of words adapted from English (the source language), is descriptively replaced by a noun class prefix. This can be seen in the examples in (7) below:

(7)

The replacement of the English initial syllables with the new syllables aligns the borrowed words

English (S)	Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ (B)	Gloss
/ɪntɜːprɪtər/	/mo-taβuta/	interpreter
/vɪːdiə /	/βi-ndiɔ/	video
/lɔːri/	/rɔ-ri/	lorry
/sɪˈment/	/ði-miti/	cement

with the general lexicon of Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ and thus does two things; one, it allows the grammatically correct forms of words fitted into Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ noun classes and two it allows for natural communication in the dialect.

## 2.2 Morphological Adaptation of Words Borrowed from Kiswahili to Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ

Unlike words borrowed from English which exhibit three main morphological adaptation processes, words borrowed from Kiswahili exhibit mainly prefix substitution process. The other process that is evident is zero transmorphemisation. Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ does not exhibit suffixation as a process. This is so because, Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ being a Bantu language like Kiswahili has vowels at word-final position due to the open syllabicity of the language. When Kiswahili words are adapted into Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ, the

vowel at the word final remains, save for a few exceptional cases where the vowel is substituted with another vowel. The processes evident in Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ words borrowed from Kiswahili are discussed below.

### 2.2.1 Substitution of the Prefix

Words borrowed from Kiswahili to Gĩkũyũ usually have noun prefixes given that both languages have the same Bantu origin. As a result, prefixation does not occur regularly as a process;<sup>3</sup> rather, what happens is that the prefixes are substituted with the ones that carry Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ phonological and morphological structure. Substitution is to some extent a morphological adaptation process which is descriptively a replacement of the initial syllable (of the source word) with a noun class prefix of the recipient language, in this case Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ. The following loanwords in data (8) borrowed from Kiswahili substitute the singular prefix {m-} with prefix {mo-} and the plural prefix {mi-} with {me-}:

(8)

Kiswahili Singular	Kiswahili Plural	Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ Singular	Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ Plural	Gloss
/m-pira/	/mi-pira/	/mo-βira/	/me-βira/	ball
/m-katε/	/mi-katε/	/mo-ɾatε/	/me-ɾatε/	bread
/m-sumari/	/mi-sumari/	/mo-sumare/	/me-sumare/	nail
/m-kεka/	/mi-kεka/	/mo-ɾεka/	/me-ɾεka/	carpet
/m-kεβε/	/mi-kεβε/	/mo-kεβε/	/me-kεβε/	tin

In the following loanwords from Kiswahili, Kiswahili singular prefix {ki-} is replaced by Gĩkũyũ {ɾe-} also realized as {ke-} and Kiswahili plural prefix {vi-} is replaced by Gĩkũyũ {i-}. These prefixations give the borrowed words Gĩkũyũ structure and are therefore accepted in communication. Examples are as in (9) below:

<sup>3</sup> This research however notes a few exceptional instances where actual prefixation occurs as exemplified in section 2.2.3



(9)

<b>Kiswahili Singular</b>	<b>Kiswahili Plural</b>	<b>Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ Singular</b>	<b>Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ Plural</b>	<b>Gloss</b>
/ki-kɔmbɛ/	/vi-kɔmbɛ/	/ɤe-kɔmbɛ/	/i-kɔmbɛ/	cup
/ki-tanda/	/vi-tanda/	/ɤe-tanda/	/i-tanda/	bed
/ki- <b>j</b> ikɔ/	/vi- <b>j</b> ikɔ/	/ɤe-sikɔ/	/i-sikɔ/	spoon
/ki-faru/	/vi-faru/	/ke-βaro/	/i-βaro/	military tank
/ki-atu/	/vi-atu/	/ke-rato/	/i-rato/	shoe
/ki-fuŋgɔ/	/vi-fuŋgɔ/	/ke-βuŋgɔ/	/i-βuŋgɔ/	button
/ki-beriti/	/vi-beriti/	/ke-βereti/	/i-βereti/	matchbox

In other instances, the singular morph prefix {∅-} is substituted by {e-} in Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ while its corresponding plural prefix {ma-} is realized as {ma-}; hence zero substitution in this case. Some examples are in data (10) below:

(10)

<b>Kiswahili Singular</b>	<b>Kiswahili Plural</b>	<b>Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ Singular</b>	<b>Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ Plural</b>	<b>Gloss</b>
/∅-sanduku/	/ma-sanduku/	/e-ðandoko/	/ma-ðandoko/	box
/∅-dɛbɛ/	/ma-dɛbɛ/	/e-rɛβɛ/	/ma-rɛβɛ/	tin container
/∅-nanasi/	/ma-nanasi/	/e-nanaði/	/ma-nanaði/	pineapple

Just like the case with English loanwords, most Kiswahili loanwords fall in the classes 9/10 (the zero-prefix group). In such words, the zero morph, {∅-} represents both the singular and plural morpheme depending on the context. Examples include (11) below:

(11)

Kiswahili Singular	Kiswahili Plural	Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ Singular	Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ Plural	Gloss
/ø-pasi/	/ø-pasi/	/ø-βaði/	/ø-βaði/	ironbox
/ø-samaki/	/ø-samaki/	/ø-ðamaki/	/ø-ðamaki/	fish
/ø-bendera/	/ø-bendera/	/ø-βendera/	/ø-βendera/	flag
/ø-sabuni/	/ø-sabuni/	/ø-ðaðuni/	/ø-ðaðuni/	soap
/ø-sa: /	/ø-sa: /	/ø-ða: /	/ø-ða: /	watch
/ø-kabati/	/ø-kabati/	/ø-kaβati/	/ø-kaβati/	cupboard
/ø-simu/	/ø-simu/	/ø-ðimo/	/ø-ðimo/	telephone

### 2.2.2 Kiswahili zero transmorphemisation

Some of the loanwords borrowed from Kiswahili to Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ undergo what Filipovic (1996), Beaugrande *et. al* (1998) and Jelena (2007) among others, refer to as “zero transmorphemisation”. In this context, this means that the borrowed words undergo zero change after adaptation and as a result they remain as they are in Kiswahili. Examples of such words are in (12) below:

(12)

Kiswahili	Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ	Gloss
/ŋaŋana/	/ŋaŋana/	keep trying
/ . a- a/	/ . a- a/	tomato
/ndɔ: /	/ndɔ: /	bucket

### 2.2.3 Prefixation

It may be argued that words borrowed from Kiswahili into Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ do not undergo the process of prefixation since they already have their original prefixes. However, a few exceptions to this rule have been noted. There are words borrowed from Kiswahili but which require prefixation. This

study has noted that most of such words are borrowings into Kiswahili, especially from Arabic, but which did not acquire the morphological structure of Kiswahili and thus Bantu languages. When such words are borrowed into Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ through Kiswahili, they acquire both singular and plural prefixes and their structure therefore changes drastically. Such changes reflect the structure of Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ. Examples of such borrowings are in (13) below:

(13)

<b>Kiswahili Singular</b>	<b>Kiswahili Plural</b>	<b>Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ Singular</b>	<b>Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ Plural</b>	<b>Gloss</b>
/karatasi/	/karatasi/	/ka-rataði/	/to-rataði/	paper
/kalamu/	/kalamu/	/ka-ramu/	/to-ramu/	pen

### **Conclusion**

This paper has examined the morphological adaptation of English and Kiswahili loanwords into Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ. It has shown that the adaptation processes allow for natural communication in Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ after borrowing has taken place. Several adaptation processes have been identified and these include prefixation and suffixation. Substitution and zero transmorphemisation have also been identified as adaptation processes. English words are adapted into the morphology of Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ through prefixation, suffixation and substitution. Kiswahili words on the other hand are adapted through prefixation, substitution and, to a lesser degree, zero transmorphemisation and prefixation. Suffixation process does not apply to Kiswahili loanwords because Kiswahili is a Bantu language just like Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ where the words end in a vowel. All these process allow for acceptable communication while bringing in new items and thoughts, artifacts and culture into Gĩ-Gĩchũgũ.

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