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Natalia Budohoska

KISWAHILI LOANWORDS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE OF KENYA WITHIN A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Abstract

The sociolinguistic context of prolonged language contact in contemporary Kenya should lead to a certain amount of influence of the languages on one another, e.g. through loanwords. The main aim of the present paper was to examine English in Kenya to show what kind of words are borrowed from African languages and their analysis within the framework of the borrowing theories formulated in Tappolet (1913–16), Haugen (1950), Weinreich (1953), Dardano – Trifone (1995), Hock – Joseph (1996), Krefeld (1999) and McColl-Millar (2007). The data for this study come from the *International corpus of English for East Africa* (ICE-EA).

1. Introduction

Since the time of winning her independence in 1963, Kenya has been engaged in a quest for national cohesion and a collective identity, simultaneously promoting cultural and linguistic pluralism. Haugen (1950: 58) claims that "[f]or any large scale borrowing a considerable group of bilinguals has to be assumed" and the sociolinguistic situation in Kenya and the linguistic choices of her citizens prove that there exists a large percentage of the Kenyan population who maintain intense day-to-day contacts within their work and home environments with several different languages. Kenyans have been functioning within an unofficial trilingual policy for several decades now and although this division is not directly supported by legal decisions, it is quite consistent and homogeneous throughout the whole society. This paper is part of a larger study aimed at describing the English language functioning in a mostly non-native, multilingual environment of post-colonial Kenya.

English came to Kenya through the process of British colonization in the 19th and the early 20th centuries. Since then it has gained immense control over a wide range of functionally crucial domains, such as politics, education, religion and, to a certain, though limited extent, family life. English therefore, is directly involved in the question regarding national identity and continues to be used alongside Kiswahili and tribal languages by a large proportion of the society on a daily basis.

The multilingual speakers in Kenya have acquired their languages most closely to Weinreich's (1953: 9–11) Type A pattern, i.e. in separate environments, and now these languages continue to function in separate linguistic systems. "In Saussurean terms, each language has its own set of signifiers (forms) and signifieds (meanings); viz., the forms of each language remain separate with their own associated meanings." (Field 2002: 10).

The national, tribal and linguistic identities of Kenyans present a fascinating, heterogeneous picture which implies a large scale bi- or multilingualism. Individual speakers in Kenya often have a linguistic repertoire ranging from two to three, or even four or five languages. The number of languages known and the level of competence are determined by the speaker's tribal background but also to a very large extent by the socio-economic status and the level of education. The knowledge of only one, i.e. the corresponding tribal language is very rare in contemporary Kenya since even in the most remote parts of the country intertribal communication is part of day-to-day life and brings about the necessity of knowing Kiswahili (rural and urban areas) and/or English (mostly urban areas) to be able to function.

English in Kenya functions mostly as a second language and it is the tribal languages which outnumber both English and Kiswahili as the speakers' first languages. Moreover, English is taught through the system of education, initially as an obligatory subject and later as the main medium of instruction. Finally, it serves the role of a *lingua franca* alongside Kiswahili for people not having a language in common. The results of such close contacts between these two languages remain to be extensively studied and this paper offers a detailed analysis of African loanwords in English in Kenya.

2. Selection of data and methodology

The data for this paper come from the Kenyan component extracted from the *International corpus of English for East Africa* (henceforward referred to as ICE-K) which is an international project aiming at collecting English language samples from various countries around the world where English functions as a first or second language. The ICE-K consists of samples from

both written and spoken language, of formal and informal use and sums up to over 800,000 words.

A list of Kiswahili loanwords in the ICE-K was adduced from the ICE-K by means of the Ant.Conc concondarcing software (available online) and it was found that in the ICE-K there is a total of 1250 tokens labelled as borrowings from the East African languages, 715 in the spoken component of the corpus and 535 in the written. After a brief overview of frequency at the beginning of this study, certain inconsistencies were noticed, e.g. that not all tokens for every lexical item are labelled as East African borrowings, hence the number 1250 must be taken as a rough estimate and referred to as the minimum number. Despite prolonged and intense language contact, the total number of Africanisms accounted only for 0.15% of the total number of words in the ICE-K.

For the purpose of this study, only lexical items appearing more than two times and in at least two different texts were selected. This was done in order to include, as far as possible, fixed loanwords rather than obscure occurrences or examples limited in context to a single text or a single speaker. Additionally, only single words (apart from 'jua kali' which is a proper name and was hence included) were taken into account because whole sentences in Kiswahili appearing in the ICE-K were considered as cases of code-switching, i.e. "the use of material from two (or more) languages by a single speaker in a single conversation" (Thomason 2001: 132). Following these criteria 31 lexical items were found with the total number of 717 tokens. The spoken component of the ICE-K contained 459 tokens and the written component contained 256 tokens.

There are various ways of categorizing lexical borrowings depending on reasons for the borrowing process to begin with, through different integration processes and finishing with different applications of the borrowed terms. First of all the selected Kiswahili loanwords found in the ICE-K were briefly analysed according to the criteria set up by Tappolet (1913–16), Haugen (1950), Weinreich (1953), Dardano – Trifone (1995), Hock – Joseph (1996), Krefeld (1999) and McColl-Millar (2007). Additionally the analysis of the loanwords was divided into categories according to the semantic fields and word classes they represent. Also, the meanings of the loanwords were analysed and English equivalents were looked for. Finally, the stylistic analysis dealt with the spoken versus written components of the corpus as well as formal versus informal language samples.

3. Kiswahili loanwords in the theoretical framework

Presented in Table 1 are the 31 Kiswahili loanwords, fulfilling the criteria set up for this study found in the ICE-K.

Table 1. The list of Kiswahili loanwords found in the ICE-K

	Kiswahili	Word class	English Translation	Number of occurrences
1.	**wananchi**	n.	citizens, people	95
2.	**matatu**	n.	minibus taxi	91
3.	orkoiyot	n.	king, supreme chief, witch-doctor	61
4.	**harambee**	n.	let's pull together! (proverb)	57
5.	jua kali	n.	'fierce sun' name of an agricultural organization	42
6.	**shamba**	n.	field, farm, plantation	38
7.	chang'aa	n.	strong, locally brewed alcohol, usually illegal,	34
8.	**mama**	n.	mother, a term used to mark seniority and respect	34
9.	**bwana**	n.	man, Mr., gentleman	31
10.	si	v.	be not	30
11.	ati	excl.	hey!/say	25
12.	yaani/yani	int.	that is, in other words	19
13.	kwani	conj.	because	15
14.	**baba**	n.	father, dad, uncle, a term used to mark seniority and respect	14
15.	ama	conj.	either, or	13
16.	jimbo	n.	region, province, county, district	13
17.	**ugali**	n.	maize flour cooked in water, polenta	12
18.	**askari**	n.	soldier, policeman, guard	11
19.	busaa	n.	traditional, frothy drink	10
20.	nini	pron.	what	10
21.	**baraza**	n.	meeting, council, gathering of the elders of a tribe	9
22.	**mzee**	n.	respected man, old person, parent, ancestor	9
23.	**sufuria**	n.	metal, cooking pot	8
24.	mwalimu	n.	teacher	6
25.	sijui	v.	I do not know	6
26.	mpaka	prep.	until, up to, as far as	5
27.	-dogo	adj.	small	5
28.	jembe	n.	hoe	4

29.	**panga**	n.	long knife	4
30.	karibu	int.	welcome	3
31.	lakini	conj.	but, however, nevertheless	3
Total				**717**

An important aspect of these lexical items which needs to be pointed out is the fact that Kiswahili loanwords in English are in the vast majority of cases strictly limited to describing the African reality and are not used by the native speakers of English outside of this context. Although the items marked as bold in Table 1 are *OED* entries, they are all annotated as predominantly referring to a Kenyan or East African context.

Kiswahili loanwords found in the ICE-K and presented in Table 1 were discussed in light of various linguistic theories describing the process of borrowing. The first theory discussed here, connected with the reasons behind the process of borrowing (Tappolet; cf. Krefeld 1999: 275), allows one to reveal that 27% of the loanwords are "necessary", i.e. labelling new concepts referring to strictly Kenyan foods and drinks as well as reflecting the social ladder with terms used to mark respect, seniority or authority, while 73% are "luxury" loans with rough English equivalents. The terms *baba* and *mama* were classified in both categories.

Table 2. The list of Kiswahili loanwords classified as necessary and luxury

Necessary	Luxury
baba *(a term used to mark seniority and respect), baraza, busaa, chang'aa, harambee,* **mama** *(a term used to mark seniority and respect), matatu, mzee, orkoiyot*	*ama, ati, askari,* **baba** *(father), bwana, jembe, jimbo, jua kali, karibu, kwani, lakini,* **mama** *(mother), mpaka, mwalimu, mwananchi, nini, panga, shamba, si, sijui, sufuria, ugali, yaani, -dogo*

Since English in Kenya is a heritage of colonial times, the feature of prestige also needs to be accounted for. Kiswahili and English in Kenya function mostly as second or third languages among the multilingual speakers who continue to identify tribal languages as the first (Budohoska 2010: 38–41). Moreover there seems to be a distinction between the effects that using either of these languages may impose, Kiswahili seems to be the language of solidarity, while English plays the role of the language of power (Githiora 2008: 236).

Hock and Joseph (1996: 274) distinguish three possible scenarios for the relationship between languages in terms of the feature of prestige: adstrata, superstratum and substratum. Although McColl-Millar (2007: 388) claims that in the case of a post-colonial reality we could speak of a superstratal context when "the socially powerful element in society influences the language of less powerful groupings (…)", in fact a clear-cut conclusion regarding the prestige relationship between Kiswahili and English in Kenya according to this distinction on the basis of loanwords found in the ICE-K is difficult, if not impossible to draw. Most of the available loanwords in the ICE-K fail to reveal any straightforward relationship between Kiswahili and English in terms of prestige. As regards the last arrangement, i.e. substratum when the source language is regarded with less prestige than the target one, resulting in borrowings with negative connotations, there do not seem to be any examples of that situation in the ICE-K.

Most of the loanwords reflect basic, everyday vocabulary which could be an indication of the equal status of Kiswahili and English in Kenya. Crystal's claim about emancipating varieties of English that "[u]sing local words is then no longer to be seen as slovenly ignorant, within a country; it is respectable' it may even be 'cool'." (Crystal 2006: 432) seems to be fully valid in the context of Kenya. The local words begin to be used across all the levels of the society, even people like politicians, teachers, artists etc., in spoken and written form and can be found in all the media. This is indicative that the prestige of the English language, although still secure, is weakening over the years following Kenya's independence and African languages begin to climb the prestige ladder. The number of loanwords in the ICE-K is nonetheless too low to provide a basis for any binding claims regarding the prestige of Kiswahili compared with English.

The classification into "popular" versus "learned" loanwords (Pogatscher 1888, cf. Pyles 1943: 891), apart from distinguishing words of everyday use from loans referring to cultural or scientific activity, also points out that the first category is transmitted mostly through speech as opposed to the second category which is transmitted more through the written language. Looking at the list of loanwords in the ICE-K it can be immediately noticed that there are almost twice as many tokens in the spoken component of the corpus, i.e. 65% which would indicate them as "popular" loanwords. Looking at the translations of the loanwords confirms this claim and it may be concluded that the Kiswahili loanwords in the ICE-K are "popular" rather than "learned".

As regards the criterion set up by Weinreich (1953: 57–59) and supported by McColl-Millar (2007: 27) which states that low frequency words are more commonly borrowed than high frequency words the Kiswahili loanwords in English in Kenya seem to, though only partially, contradict it. There is

a notable group of Kiswahili function words which were found in the ICE-K, including conjunctions: *ama* 'or', *kwani* 'because', *lakini* 'but'; preposition: *mpaka* 'until'; pronoun: *nini* 'what'; and interjection: *yaani* 'that is'. They are, however, used in a limited number of contexts and significantly more commonly in the spoken component of the corpus with the English words prevailing in number in both written and spoken language samples. There are also two kinship terms: *mama* 'mother' and *baba* 'father' as well as simple adjectives, such as *-dogo* 'small'. These terms, as was the case with function words, are widely used, but they do not replace the original English terms denoting the same concepts which continue to be used in the ICE-K with a much higher frequency.

Finally, no discussion of loanwords is complete without comparing the loanword with the "model", i.e. the original pattern (Haugen 1950: 60). Looking at the list of Kiswahili loanwords in the ICE-K (Table 1) and comparing them against their original forms available in dictionaries revealed practically no change in form. The Kiswahili loanwords in English can therefore be labelled as "imported", "non-integrated" or "adopted" (Haugen 1950: 60, Dardano – Trifone 1995: 191, Hock – Joseph 1996: 275) as they can immediately be identified as foreign elements in English and are clearly recognized by the native speakers of Kiswahili as satisfactory imitations.

4. Semantic categories of Kiswahili loanwords

Additionally, the loanwords were divided according to the semantic field that they can be assigned to. The semantic groups are tailored specifically for this study according to the context in which the loanwords appear instead of adopting an existing distinction as to best reflect the African borrowings in the English language in Kenya. The semantic fields recognized for the purpose of this study were divided into seven groups with the numbers in brackets indicating the number of items within each category: function words (9), socio-political spectrum (6), work (4), food and drink (3), kinship terms (3), tools and weapons (3) and miscellaneous (3). The Africanisms belonging to the last category will not be analysed here as they cannot be treated as representative of any unified branch of Kenyan culture which could indicate the need for such borrowings.

Figure 1 presents the number of tokens representing each of the semantic fields set up for this study (except for the category 'miscellaneous', 50 tokens). The semantic field labelled as function words has the most lexical items, followed by the categories of socio-political spectrum and work, whereas in the number of tokens it is the category of socio-political spectrum which is represented by the highest number of tokens (244), followed by

categories of work (146) and, finally, function words (126). Overall the categories with the most different lexical items are represented by highest numbers of tokens although not in the exact same order.
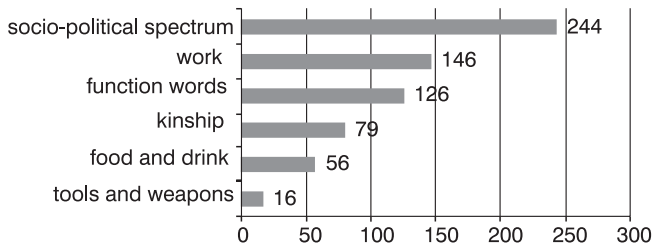

Fig. 1 The number of tokens in each semantic field

According to Görlach (2004: 10), "[a]n item is borrowed in a specific situation and linguistic context." He explains that this implies that only one sense is being involved and adds that it rarely remains the same in the target language but that it continues to develop, e.g. that the meaning may be further narrowed down. This is meant to distinguish the new borrowing from words already existing in the same semantic field. As a result, the meaning of the word which served as the model for the loanword in the source language, may vary from the meaning of the borrowing in the target language. While this is certainly true under normal circumstances, it should be borne in mind that the underlying reasons for linguistic borrowing from Kiswahili into English is transferring identity, hence preserving the original meaning referring to an original Kenyan concept is somewhat crucial. It is true, however, that the loanwords may appear only in limited contexts if there are English equivalents already existing. Figure 2 presents the loanwords which have their English equivalents in the ICE-K discussed in this study compared in terms of the numbers of tokens with their English equivalents in the instances where those rough equivalents can be found. The words *baraza, busaa, chang'aa, -dogo, harambee, jimbo, jua kali, karibu matatu, mzee, orkoiyot, si* and *ugali*, due to a lack of English equivalents in the ICE-K were excluded from Figure 2 below.

On the basis of Figure 2 we can immediately see that the number of Africanisms in the ICE-K is marginal compared with the English translations. A tentative conclusion could therefore be drawn that the Kiswahili loanwords, both those with English equivalents and those without, function in a limited context and not as words used to transmit meaning but mostly to transmit identity or to label concepts not found in English.
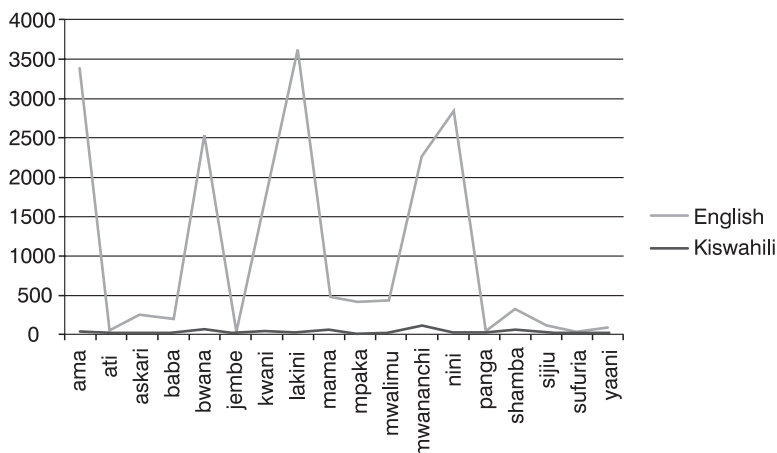
Fig. 2. The number of tokens for Kiswahili loanwords compared with English counterparts

5. Kiswahili loanwords according to word class

The word classes distinguished in Kiswahili loanwords in the ICE-K analysed in this study, include: nouns (20), conjunctions (3), interjections (2), verbs (2), adjectives (1), exclamations (1), prepositions (1) and pronouns (1). Looking more closely at the contexts of use it can be seen immediately that all these loans confirm Görlach's claim (1994: 229) that in Western languages words are usually borrowed into the same word-class to which they belong in the source language, as they continue to function in the same word classes in the English language in Kenya as they did in Kiswahili.

The Kiswahili loanwords in the ICE-K revealed a total of 717 tokens. Figure 3 presents the percentages of all the tokens within each of the word classes excluding the proverb *harambee*.

As can be seen in Figure 3 Kiswahili loanwords in the ICE-K confirm that "(...) nouns are borrowed more frequently than verbs or adjectives." (McColl-Millar 2007: 27). In the case of Kenya the number of tokens representing the word class of nouns provide for three-quarters of all the loanwords while the other seven categories add up to the remaining one-quarter of all the loanwords. This is of course due to the fact that in any language nouns are more numerous than other word classes to begin with and moreover, new concepts which require labelling are more likely to be denoted by nouns as well. McColl-Millar (2007: 27) also points out that nouns are easier to assimilate within the grammatical structure of the target language.
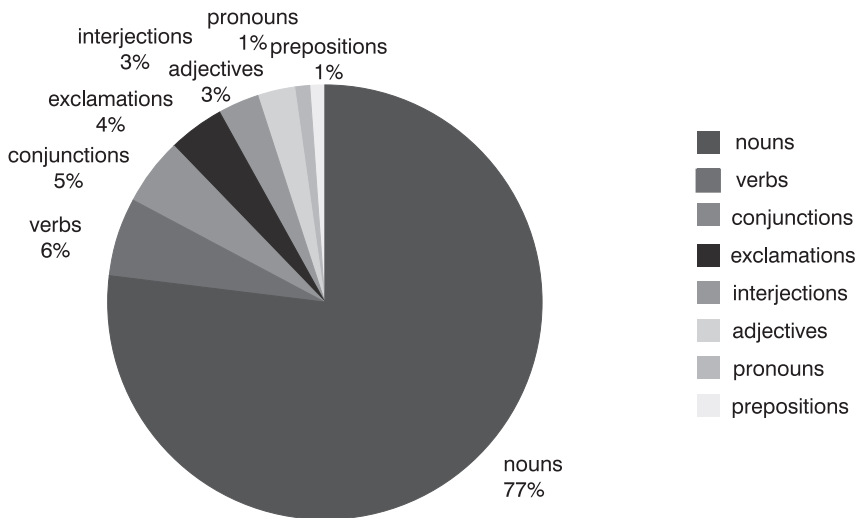
Fig. 3. The number of tokens according to word-class

6. Stylistic features of Kiswahili loanwords

Apart from aspects such as these discussed so far the stylistic features of loanwords needed to be accounted for. When entering a target language the loanwords may become part of common, everyday vocabulary or they may remain restricted in use to particular contexts. They can be formal or informal and colloquial; archaic, fashionable, technical and there may also be differences in the social status of the users and the kind of utterances in which they appear.

The first stylistic difference in the use of Africanisms in the ICE-K was noticed in the frequency of the terms depending on the type of text. There was a significantly higher accumulation of these lexical items in the spoken component of the corpus (65%) than in the written component (35%). In order to be able to draw more detailed conclusions the number of tokens for each loanword was counted in individual texts included in the corpus as to find out what kind of texts within the formal versus informal classification are influenced the most and by which loanwords. In order to be able to make comparisons between various corpus components, the frequency of lexical items was counted per one million words.

Figures 4 and 5 illustrate the number of tokens representing Kiswahili loanwords per type of text. As has been shown earlier the number of tokens is significantly higher in the informal component of the ICE-K. It turns out that the most affected type of text are private conversations which contain twice as many tokens as the category termed broadcast discussions, followed by
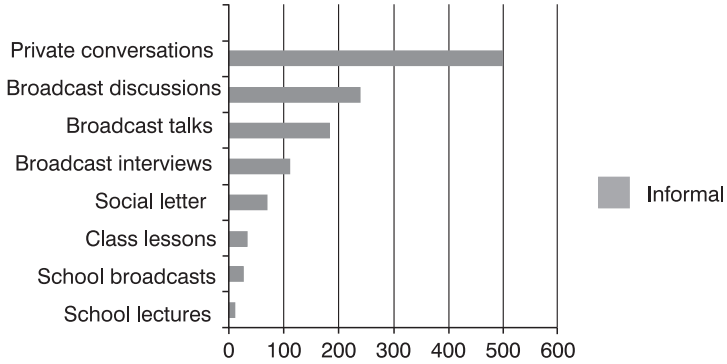
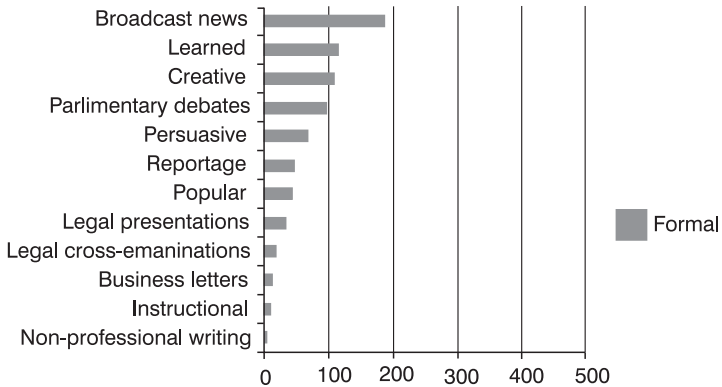Fig. 4. The number of tokens according to type of text: informal

Fig. 5. The number of tokens according to type of text: formal

broadcast news, talks and interviews. The language of the media turns out to be most significantly influenced by Africanisms. The least influenced types of texts are all of the categories connected with education: class lessons, school broadcasts, school lectures and non-creative writing (which consists of essays written by students), which could indicate a tendency to avoid mixing English with Kiswahili when used as a medium of instruction, both by teachers and students in an effort to preserve English in its original form.

However, when assessing the number of Africanisms in the formal and informal components of the ICE-K, not only the total number of tokens is important but also the number of different tokens used, as well as the word class to which they belong. The highest variety of tokens can be observed in private conversations (16), followed by social letters (10) and broadcast talks (10).

7. Conclusions

The present study dealt with African borrowings in the English language used in Kenya. The data came from the *International corpus of English*. The 31 Kiswahili loanwords, fulfilling the criteria set up for this study, were represented by 717 tokens in total. At the beginning of this study the Kiswahili loanwords found in the ICE-K were analysed in light of various linguistic theories describing the process of borrowing. The first theory was connected with the reasons behind the borrowing and revealed that 27% of the loanwords were "necessary", i.e. they labelled new concepts, and 73% were "luxury" loans with rough English equivalents. As regards the issue of prestige, on the basis of the loanwords in the ICE-K it could be stated that English and Kiswahili enjoy equal status, as most of the loanwords are examples of basic, everyday vocabulary. It is also worth mentioning that Kiswahili loanwords in the English language in Kenya are no longer regarded as deviations indicating the speaker's ignorance, but are more and more openly used by people across all levels of the society.

Moreover it could be concluded that the Kiswahili loanwords in the ICE-K are mostly "popular", rather than "learned" and when compared with the original model prove to be "imported", "adopted" or "non-integrated" (depending on the terminology used), as there is practically no change in form with only very little variation in the spelling of three of the loanwords.

The Kiswahili loanwords analysed in this paper were also divided into groups depending on the semantic fields they represented: socio-political spectrum, work, kinship terms, food and drink, tools and weapons as well as the category of function words. Some of the loanwords introduced into English in Kenya did not gain a life of their own but continue to represent the truly African concepts that would otherwise be difficult to express in English. On the other hand over half of the loanwords have equivalents in English and in that case the frequency of the English counterparts is much higher than that of the Kiswahili loanwords. In the majority of cases loanwords preserved their original meaning and can therefore be used to refer to labelling new concepts or to signal identities through the use of the African label instead of the English one.

The analysis also revealed that 77% of the Kiswahili loanwords are nouns and that loanwords in the target language preserve the same function they had in the source language. The presence of a significant group of function words among the Africanisms, however, indicates more intense language contacts between English and Kiswahili.

Finally, the stylistic features of Kiswahili loanwords in the ICE-K were accounted for. It was discovered that the loanwords affect the spoken and informal components of the ICE-K to a larger extent. The most affected by

an influx of Kiswahili loanwords are private conversations and the samples representing language used in the media. The least influenced are text types connected with the system of education.

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