

## **A socio-pragmatic analysis of lexical borrowing in a multilingual setting**

**James Matseshe Sasala**

Department of Language and Literature Education  
Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology, KENYA  
email: [jmatseshe1@gmail.com](mailto:jmatseshe1@gmail.com)  
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3552-9321>

**Abstract** - The study explored how a speaker's linguistic environment influences lexical borrowing in Lukabarás, focusing specifically on the socio-pragmatic functions within the home and business domains. The primary aim was to examine how these domains impact the borrowing of lexical items from the Nandi language among Lukabarás speakers in the Chepsaita Scheme. Employing a descriptive research design, data was collected from 36 purposively sampled respondents. The respondents included individuals from intermarried households in the home domain and shop owners and open-air vendors in the business domain. The analysis concentrated on borrowed nouns and verbs, reflecting the dynamic nature of lexical integration in multilingual settings. The findings revealed that the home domain accounted for more instances of lexical borrowing than the business domain. This variation was attributed to the intimate and sustained interactions in the home setting, which fostered a greater need for cross-linguistic accommodation and communication. In contrast, borrowing in the business domain was more transactional and functional, reflecting the utilitarian nature of interactions in commercial environments. The study concluded that lexical borrowing in Lukabarás serves as a pragmatic strategy to enhance cross-cultural communication and promote social cohesion in a linguistically diverse community. These findings underline the significant role of socio-pragmatic factors in shaping language use in multilingual societies.

**Keywords:** socio-pragmatics, lexical borrowing, multilingualism, linguistic environment, domain of language use

## 1. Introduction

Scholarly evidence shows that the sets of meanings arising from novel lexical constructions in language contact situations are determined by the pragmatic functions of such items in the context of their use. In this light, Khamzaev (2021); Susov (2012) argue that there is a direct relation between the creation of new lexical items and their pragmatic function. Socio-pragmatics focuses on the way sociocultural contexts contribute to language use depending on factors such as the formality or informality of the situation, the speakers in the context of language, how the speakers know each other and the reason for their interaction (Salmani, 2007). Additionally, language contact in a multilingual setting can be manifested through the desire for the speaker of one language to know something about the culture of the speakers of a foreign language to enable him or her to use their language appropriately (Khamzaev, 2021). Therefore, the object of pragmatics is the relationship between linguistic units and the conditions of their application in a specific communicative and pragmatic space (Khamzaev, 2021).

In the present investigation, the languages spoken in Chepsaita Scheme, which is one of the thirty-two registered settlement schemes in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya, present a situation of varied outcomes of language contact (Sasala et al., 2019; Nzomo, 1995). One such case is where Lukabaras speakers in this multilingual setting borrow lexical items from the Nandi. The study hypothesized that is attributed to the fact that the speakers of the two languages are intermarried and lexical borrowing becomes a socially viable linguistic option to foster their interactions. Since the speakers of Lukabaras who were investigated in this study, migrated to Chepsaita Scheme, which was originally inhabited by Nandi speakers, there was need to establish the motivation for their borrowing of lexical items. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the pragmatic choices that enhanced lexical borrowing in Lukabaras from the Nandi and how the linguistic environment contributed to the lexical items that were borrowed.

Scholars have described lexical borrowing in various ways. For instance, when different language users interact, one of the possible outcomes of their contact is the transfer of lexical items from one language into the other as manifested in the everyday discourse of multilinguals (Sankoff, 2001). However, in order to succinctly explain the notion of lexical borrowing, it is necessary to provide the context in which it occurs. Therefore, we ought to first define the term linguistic borrowing which basically refers to the transfer of linguistic elements among languages in situations of language contact (Tadmor, 2009; Haspelmath, 2009). As such, lexical material is the most common form of what is easily borrowed (Haugen, 1992; Higa, 1979). In this view, lexical borrowing is understood as a reflection of the cultural behaviour of what is borrowed and manifested as a product of the borrowing process (Higa, 1979).

From the foregoing arguments, Van Hout and Muysken (1994) argue that lexical borrowing involves incorporating foreign items into the borrowing language for various reasons that surpass the needs of one language. Nevertheless, the borrowed items must conform to the structure of the borrowing language which includes phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic adaptation (Van Hout & Muysken, 1994). A distinction is made between the terms adaptation and adoption whereby adaptation refers to the nativization of the borrowed item for it to fit in the structure of the receiving language whereas adoption is where a word is borrowed in its source language form and maintains the features in the borrowing language (McMahon, 1994). However, it is usually up to the speakers of a language to choose between adaptation or adoption because not every borrowed word is incorporated in the same manner (McMahon, 1994). Furthermore, the extent of lexical borrowing depends on a range of social and linguistic factors that vary from one contact situation to another.

Although all languages can create new words, scholars have always raised the question of what motivates the borrowing and why languages influence each other (Haspelmath, 2009). Furthermore, Thomason and Kaufman (2001) argue that except for the reason that the speakers of one language want to copy another's language because they admire it or they respect the users there would be no need for some native words to be replaced by other words from another language. Similarly, Haugen (1992), posits that the reasons for borrowing may be externally motivated especially where the borrowed words are regarded as prestigious in the receiving language or because the speakers of one language feel inferior to the speakers of another language. For instance, in a multilingual setting where various language speakers have migrated to, using or not using borrowed words is not confined to language social prestige only instead it also reflects the choices the speakers make. Therefore, speakers may resort to foreign ready-made designations as necessity which may include the economic advantages that come with such borrowing (Haspelmath, 2009; Winford, 2003).

On the other hand, Matras (2009) argues that speakers of one language may copy elements in another language which is regarded as socially more powerful and dominant community for them to gain approval and social status. Such borrowing may occur even if there are equivalent and efficient forms of

the borrowed exist in the borrowed native language, because of the special conversational effect that is evoked by the borrowed word; or they borrow words just to get along with their interlocutors (McMahon, 1994). In this perspective, borrowing is viewed as a mechanism for social integration whereby Speakers of the borrowing language engage into language domains that are interactive points with the source language. In these cases, the integration of foreign items into one's language is motivated by the need for the interlocutors to socially fit in the various contexts of interaction (Rendon, 2008). Whatever the situation of borrowing in the multilingual setting, there is need for the speakers to negotiate a complex repertoire of linguistic structures and to balance effectiveness and precision of expression against the social demand on complying with the norm to select only context-appropriate structures (Matras, 2009). Therefore, Lexical borrowing through language contact bridges the lexical-conceptual gaps between the source language and the receiving language (Myers-Scotton, 2002; Haspelmath, 2009).

The present study argues that it is the socio-pragmatic language contact areas that motivate lexical borrowing. Thus, borrowed lexical items are a product of the linguistic environment from which they are created. On this basis, the study investigated the influence the home domain and business domains of language use on lexical borrowing between Lukabaras and Nandi.

Ekoro and Gunn (2021) argue that aspects of language and the context in which they are used cannot be separated, thus, context is a crucial factor that helps to infer meaning whether in spoken or written communication. In the same vein, Brown and Yule (2000); Armstrong and Ferguson (2010) argue that the immediate circumstance or the environment of language use is the speaker's context and as such language is dependent on the communicator's environment or situation in which the language is used. For this reason, it is argued that different contexts require different kinds of vocabulary and different expressions that are suitable to that particular context (Armstrong and Ferguson, 2010).

According to Milroy (1987), the relationship between linguistic variables with other linguistic elements includes sociolinguistic variables like a speaker's linguistic environment, age, ethnic group, social class and gender. As such, it is argued that social factors which are also described as speaker variables or the social characteristics of speakers co vary with linguistic variables but do not constitute varied meanings of the referents. Since there is a relationship between the linguistic variables and the speaker social characteristics, fundamentally then any non-linguistic feature can be assumed to influence the use of a particular linguistic variable (Hocini, 2011). In this perspective, the present study investigated the relationship between the linguistic environment of a speaker of Lukabaras and the borrowing of lexical items from the Nandi. The aim was to establish the pragmatic role of the home and business domain of interaction on the lexical borrowing in Lukabaras from Nandi in Chepsaita Scheme.

The study applied the concept of linguistic environment to imply the immediate context of interaction in which there is borrowing of words resulting from language contact in given domains of language use. This operational term was used in order to take into account the general social factors that enhance communication in the context of inter language contact in a multilingual setting such as Chepsaita Scheme. Therefore, the study investigated the typical contexts of interaction between Lukabaras and Nandi through which lexical borrowing manifested. Accordingly, the study focused on the home domain due to the fact that there were intermarriages between the Nandi and Kabaras. The choice of the business domain was because there are many linguistic groups in Chepsaita Scheme and among them are the Nandi and Lukabaras speakers who ostensibly engaged in business activities among others.

The concept of domain is a notion that is socio-culturally used to refer to societal institutions through which various contexts of communication are manifested as regards how speakers relate and use language (Fishman, 1972; 1977; 1999). In this perspective, domains specify significant groups of interactional situations that offer varied ways of using language in multilingual settings (Fishman, 1977; Genomo, 2021). As cited in Wanjala (2014), the domains include home, religion, business, education, government services, and mass media and they are usually ordered from the less formal to the more formal. For instance, home is described as an informal locale that is more private than public settings such as a school which more formal (Fishman, 1999). Nevertheless, Adams (2012) and Mushtaq (2016) argue that the home domain is the most important domain of language use and is depended on by a multilingual society since it is common and has family subdivisions that identify different roles of family members. On the other hand, the business domain has the sub domains of private business and marketing. Therefore, the dialect used when people are doing business is important because it is used in the transactions, and facilitates exchange of goods and services (Adams, 2012).

Similarly, Bloom (1972); Fishman (1999) refer to domains as unique sets of socio-cultural environments of interaction such as home, market and church. For this reason, domains can be understood as contexts which are typical of the interactive activities and events that bring given language users together. It is, thus, argued that each domain is different from the other as manifested in the distinct sets of human

activities which essentially contribute to the speaker’s processing of contextual information. The motivation to communicate and participate in the social interactions is necessitated by involving in social behaviour (Rendon, 2008). On this basis, the present study focused on the interactions between Lukabaras and Nandi speakers in the home and business settings.

Mandila (2016) investigated a speaker’s linguistic environment by correlating the patterns lexical borrowing between two Bantu languages; Lutachooni and Lubukusu, in the home domain. However, unlike Mandila (ibid), the respondents in the present study above 18 years borrowing from a Nilotic language. In the same vein, as Wanjala (2014) investigated the contact between Lubukusu and Lutachooni. The findings established that in the home domain the dominant status of the Lubukusu speaking husbands influenced the Lutachooni speaking women to shift to Lubukusu. Wanjala (2014) reveals that the home domain as a linguistic environment played a role in which dialect was preferred. On the other hand, Whitely (1974); Myers–scotton (2000); Harris (2016) argue that the business domain includes exchanges ranging from transactions on the market through buying and selling, working in shops, open air vendoring and all informal transactions characteristic of a multilingual setting.

The study was guided by the principles of the Relevant Theory as propounded by Sperber & Wilson (2002). The theory argues that context is a central notion in a communication situation. Therefore, the aim of the Relevancy Theory is to provide pragmatic principles that guide various situations of language use. According to Sperber & Wilson’s theory, the relevance of the language choices speakers make is constrained by the context in which the linguistic items are utilized. This implies that in communicative situations, relevant items of information are those that are context effective.

## 2. Method

The study adopted a descriptive research design and qualitatively analysed the lexical items borrowed in spoken Lukabaras. The target population comprised both nouns and verbs collected through audio recording speakers of Lukabaras living in Chepsaita Scheme. The study relied on a sample of 36 respondents who were both male and female. Participants in the business domain were drawn from six markets in the study area. The focus was on the shop owners and open-air vendors category of business people. Data from speakers in the home domain was specifically collected from respondents where there were intermarriages between Lukabaras and Nandi speakers. Lukabaras is a Bantu language and one of the members of the macrolanguage Luhya (Lewis, 2021). The speakers of Lukabaras largely occupy Kakamega North Sub County in Kakamega County. They also spread to parts of the neighbouring Matete Sub County, Kakamega East as well as parts of Uasin Gishu, Nandi and Trans Nzoia counties.

According to Boen (2014) Nandi language belongs to the Nilo-Saharan language family, called Chari-Nile which is one of the six branches of Nilo-Saharan family. It belongs to the Eastern Sudanic branch. Nandi language is widely spoken in Nandi, Uasin Gishu and Trans-Nzoia. The language is also spoken in parts of neighbouring counties such as Kakamega, Vihiga and Kisumu. Chepsaita Scheme is a multilingual setting in Uasin Gishu County, however, the study did not focus on the language contact between Lukabaras and the speakers of other languages like Lutachooni, Luwanga, Lubukusu and Lulogooli.

## 3. Findings and Discussion

### 3.1 Lexical borrowing in nouns

The results showed that one of the class of words that was borrowed in spoken Lukabaras from the Nandi were nouns. Table 1 presents some of the common nouns that the study established.

Table 1 Common nouns in Lukabaras borrowed from Nandi

| Noun in Nandi  | Borrowed form of noun in Lukabaras | Native form of noun in Lukabaras | Gloss              |
|----------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------|
| <i>atelut</i>  | <i>ateluti</i>                     | <i>olutelu</i>                   | traditional tray   |
| <i>chorwet</i> | <i>omuchorweti</i>                 | <i>omucholwachi, omulina</i>     | sly person, friend |
| <i>lubchan</i> | <i>olubuchani</i>                  | <i>oluchesi</i>                  | sweat              |
| <i>karoon</i>  | <i>ekaroni</i>                     | <i>mabwibwi</i>                  | dawn               |
| <i>kiinet</i>  | <i>ekineti</i>                     | <i>elituru</i>                   | breast             |
| <i>kimiet</i>  | <i>ekimiet</i>                     | <i>obusuma</i>                   | ugali              |
| <i>kinut</i>   | <i>eshinuti</i>                    | <i>eshinuu</i>                   | traditional mortar |
| <i>moet</i>    | <i>emoeti</i>                      | <i>eyinda</i>                    | stomach            |

|                |                  |                    |                 |
|----------------|------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| <i>muren</i>   | <i>omureni</i>   | <i>omusatsa</i>    | man             |
| <i>moita</i>   | <i>emoita</i>    | <i>eshimosi</i>    | calf            |
| <i>riot</i>    | <i>erioti</i>    | <i>esimu</i>       | in-calf         |
| <i>ruandet</i> | <i>oluandeti</i> | <i>olwanda</i>     | rock            |
| <i>sireet</i>  | <i>eshirechi</i> | <i>eshirechelo</i> | market          |
| <i>siyet</i>   | <i>eshiyeti</i>  | <i>eshitere</i>    | finger          |
| <i>toot</i>    | <i>omutoti</i>   | <i>omucheni</i>    | guest, stranger |
| <i>tulwa</i>   | <i>etulwa</i>    | <i>eshiswa</i>     | ant hill        |

Source: Field data 2019

The data in Table 1 reveals that the common nouns borrowed into Lukabarás were concrete nouns that named things such as people, body parts, common household items, names for some domesticated animals and concrete items in the sociocultural environment of the speakers.

It was observed that the borrowed nouns were a reflection the most available referents in the interaction in the context of the contact between the speakers of Lukabarás and Nandi in Chepsaita Scheme. The identified nouns were therefore categorized based on the general characteristics of the common things from which they were generated. This was presented as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Summary of the borrowed nouns

| Category of borrowed common noun | Specific borrowed common noun in Lukabarás                        | Gloss  |
|----------------------------------|---|--|
| Person                           | <i>omutoti, omuchorweti, omureni, omuchepu, omuosi etukhuli</i>   | guest, friend, man, girl, old crowd  |
| Body parts                       | <i>ekineti, eshiyeti, emoeti, olubuchani</i>                      | breast, finger, stomach, sweat   |
| Household items                  | <i>ateluti, eshinuti, ekimieti, ekoti, omukango, echibungusi,</i> | traditional tray, traditional mortar, ugali, house, cooking stick, cooking pot |
| Domestic animals                 | <i>emoita, erioti, echeko</i>                                     | calf, in-calf, milk  |
| Concrete common nouns            | <i>amasaka, oluandeti, etulwa, eshirechi</i>                      | leaves, rock, anti-hill, market  |
| Abstract common nouns            | <i>elitiemu, emiendo, ekaroni, echamuke,</i>                      | temptation, goodness, dawn, greetings  |

Source: Field data 2019

From the results, it was observed that there were more nouns borrowed in the category of common nouns generated from person and household items. This showed that interactions or activities relating to people were more common hence readily influenced integration of words during communication. For instance, the words; *omutoti* ‘guest’, *omuchorweti* ‘friend’, *omureni* ‘man’, *omuchepu* ‘girl’, and *omuosi* ‘old person’ were common nouns relating to people and imply that the most available due to interactions through language contact.

### 3.2 Lexical borrowing in verbs

The study established that apart from nouns, Lukabarás speakers also borrowed verbs from Nandi. It was revealed that the verbs were generated from common activities and events in the interaction between Lukabarás and Nandi. The data of the borrowed forms of verbs was presented as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Verbs in Lukabarás borrowed from Nandi

| Form of verb in Nandi | Borrowed form of verb in Lukabarás | Native form of verb in Lukabarás | Gloss       |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------|
| <i>chor</i>           | <i>chora</i>                       | <i>yiva, chora</i>               | steal       |
| <i>lipan</i>          | <i>lipana</i>                      | <i>runga</i>                     | pay         |
| <i>muut</i>           | <i>muta</i>                        | <i>tuya</i>                      | hit         |
| <i>kas</i>            | <i>kasa</i>                        | <i>ulira</i>                     | hear        |
| <i>ker</i>            | <i>kera</i>                        | <i>yikala</i>                    | close       |
| <i>keun</i>           | <i>keuna</i>                       | <i>yosia, singa, fuwa</i>        | wash, clean |
| <i>keus</i>           | <i>keusa</i>                       | <i>yunguvasia</i>                | harass      |
| <i>kwer</i>           | <i>kwera</i>                       | <i>khupa</i>                     | hit         |
| <i>pir</i>            | <i>pira</i>                        | <i>khupa</i>                     | beat        |
| <i>rat</i>            | <i>rata</i>                        | <i>naatsa, voya</i>              | tie         |
| <i>rut</i>            | <i>ruta</i>                        | <i>tsoma</i>                     | pierce      |
| <i>tonoon</i>         | <i>tonona</i>                      | <i>sinjila</i>                   | stand       |

|            |             |               |      |
|------------|-------------|---------------|------|
| <i>yat</i> | <i>yata</i> | <i>yikula</i> | open |
|------------|-------------|---------------|------|

Source: Field data 2019

The study established that the borrowed forms of verbs in spoken Lukabaras from Nandi were comparatively fewer than nouns. This finding was in line with the argument in Rendon (2008) that whereas nouns and verbs are the most prevalent in lexical borrowing in most interactive situations across languages, nouns are the most borrowed class of words. Although the present study did not analyse the morphological and phonological constraints evident in the borrowed words, it was observed that the forms of the borrowed lexical items were morpho-phonologically integrated to fit into Lukabaras phonotactics. For instance, Lukabaras is a Bantu language and does not permit closed syllables as is the case in Nandi, a Nilotic language. For this reason, all the borrowed forms of verbs from Nandi were integrated in Lukabaras through suffixation. On the other hand, all the borrowed forms of nouns from Nandi are prefixed in Lukabaras.

### 3.3 Socio-pragmatic function of linguistic environment

The study sought to establish the pragmatic function of linguistic environment on lexical borrowing in Lukabaras in Chepsaita Scheme. The results indicated that the home domain and the business domain were the most viable language interaction contexts between Lukabaras and Nandi. The results established that lexical borrowing in the two domains of language contributed to sociocultural interlanguage interactions which were motivated by the need for the speakers to break a communication challenge.

The speakers of Lukabaras therefore used borrowed lexical items in the home domain because of intermarriages with the speakers of Nandi. As such, the borrowed items served a pragmatic function in which the choice of borrowed words was determined by the home context in which they served the communicative purpose. Table 4 presents the data of the lexical items that were borrowed within the home domain.

Table 4 Borrowed forms of lexical items in the home domain

| Form of lexical item in Nandi | Borrowed form of lexical item in Lukabaras | Gloss              |
|-------------------------------|--|--------------------|
| <i>chorwet</i>                | <i>omuchorweti</i>                         | girl               |
| <i>karon</i>                  | <i>ekaroni</i>                             | morning            |
| <i>kibungut</i>               | <i>echibungusi</i>                         | cooking pot        |
| <i>kimiet</i>                 | <i>ekimieti</i>                            | ugali              |
| <i>kinut</i>                  | <i>eshinuti</i>                            | traditional mortar |
| <i>kot</i>                    | <i>ekoti</i>                               | house              |
| <i>mukanget</i>               | <i>omukango</i>                            | cooking stick      |
| <i>muren</i>                  | <i>omureni</i>                             | man                |
| <i>toot</i>                   | <i>omutoti</i>                             | guest              |

Source: Field data 2019

The findings showed that the lexical items borrowed within the home domain were typically nouns. Lexical items such as *ekimieti*, *omutoti*, *ekoti*, *omukango*, *echibungusi* and *eshinuti* were commonly used in the home environment. Although verbs were also borrowed, the results showed that the lexical items in this word class were not unique to the home domain in their usage. For instance, the findings revealed that borrowed verbs such as *keuna* ‘wash’, *kwera* ‘hit’, *kera* ‘close’, *tonona* ‘stand’ and *yata* ‘open’ could also be commonly used in other linguistic environments such as religion, education and business depending on the circumstances. The study showed that because interactions between Lukabaras and Nandi also occurred in the business domain, there was lexical borrowing to ease communication during buying and selling. The data was presented as shown in Table 5.

Table 5 Borrowed forms of lexical items in the business domain

| Form of lexical item in Nandi | Borrowed form of lexical item in Lukabaras | Gloss            |
|-------------------------------|--|------------------|
| <i>chor</i>                   | <i>chora</i>                               | to steal         |
| <i>kas</i>                    | <i>kasa</i>                                | to hear          |
| <i>lipan</i>                  | <i>lipana</i>                              | to pay           |
| <i>lubchan</i>                | <i>olubuchani</i>                          | to sweat         |
| <i>ruandet</i>                | <i>olwandeti</i>                           | hard place, rock |
| <i>siret</i>                  | <i>eshirechi</i>                           | market           |



|              |                 |         |
|--------------|-----------------|---------|
| <i>tukul</i> | <i>etukhuli</i> | crowd   |
| <i>yat</i>   | <i>yata</i>     | to open |

Source: Field data 2019

From the data in Table 5, the results show that the usage lexical borrowing in the business domain included words like ‘*oluan deti*’ (rock), ‘*olubuchani*’ (sweat), ‘*etukhuli*’ (crowd), ‘*siret*’ (market), ‘*chora*’ (to steal), ‘*lipana*’ (to pay) ‘*kas*’ (to hear) and ‘*yata*’ (to open). However, it was observed that lexical items such as ‘*ekaroni*’ (dawn) and ‘*ekimieti*’ (ugali) could be used both at home and in the business domain. Just like some verbs borrowed in the home domain could be used in other domains, it was also observed that certain verbs borrowed in the business domain could be used in other domains. This included verbs such as ‘*chora*’ (to steal), ‘*lipana*’ (to pay) and ‘*yata*’ (open). The study observed that the flexibility in usage of the borrowed lexical items depended on the pragmatical function they played and this was determined by the linguistic environment in which a speaker used them. The results established that apart from nouns being borrowed more than verbs, the home domain accounted for many of the borrowed items. It was observed that the lesser borrowing in the business domain was attributed to the cosmopolitan nature of the business contexts which comprised open air vendors and shop from different other languages in Chepsaita Scheme.

#### 4. Conclusion

The study concluded that speakers in interlanguage interactive settings such as the home and business domains resort to lexical borrowing as a pragmatic strategy to enhance communication. The results demonstrate that in multilingual contexts like Chepsaita Scheme, there are various factors that can influence the language choices the speakers make. In this perspective, the results showed that the borrowing of lexical items from the Nandi language in the home domain was due to intermarriages between Nandi and Lukabarar speakers whereas the lexical borrowing in the business domain was due to the need to ease communication during business activities and transactions. Although related studies on linguistic borrowing have argued for varied factors as motivation for borrowing of items in language contact situations, the socio-pragmatic function of the lexical borrowing in Lukabarar was to break a communication challenge with the speakers of Nandi.

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