

Lexical Change: Naming of the Months of the Year in Ekegusii

Geoffrey Mokuu Maroko *

Department of languages and Linguistics, Machakos University

Jacqueline Nyaboe Morara

Department of English and Linguistics, Kenyatta University

Abstract

This paper documents the native terms used to name the months of the year in EkeGusii. EkeGusii is a language spoken by a Bantu speaking community (AbaGusii) in the South Western part of Kenya. It is a language with a rich cultural heritage manifested in elaborate cultural values, beliefs, traditions. The Kenyan society is multilingual with over sixty-seven languages. In order to transact Government business and ensure inter-ethnic communication, the Kenya Constitution (2010) identifies English and Kiswahili as co-official languages with Kiswahili doubling up as the national language. The two languages of wider communication have relegated the use of ethnic languages mostly to intra-ethnic interactions particularly among the aging populace. Consequently, ethnic languages such as EkeGusii are potentially endangered. Evidence for such endangerment is a shift from the use of native terms used to refer to the months of the year in EkeGusii to new names borrowed from English and Kiswahili. Further, there is no apparent intervention aimed at revitalizing the rich cultural side to the language of the AbaGusii people. Yet the Kenya Constitution (2010) calls for the protection and preservation of Kenyan languages which are threatened with extinction. To plug this research gap, this paper establishes the native names of the months of the year and their meanings and juxtaposes them to the new loan words from English and Kiswahili. The paper recommends consciousness-raising strategies such as introduction of EkeGusii programmes in local radio stations to popularize fading names with rich cultural meaning.

Keywords: lexical change, revitalization, native names, new names, culture

INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on lexical change as reflected in the naming of the months of the year. It focuses on EkeGusii, a south-western Bantu language spoken in Kenya. According to Guthrie (1940), it belongs to Zone E (Great Lakes Bantu) and in class E40. The people who speak the language are known as AbaGusii while the region where EkeGusii is spoken is called Gusii. According to Ogechi (2002), EkeGusii is used for inter-ethnic communication and is closely related to IgiKuria, Nguruimi, Zanaki and Nata.

EkeGusii comprises the EkeRogoro (Northern) and EkeMaate (Southern) dialects which are mutually intelligible in many aspects. EkeRogoro dialect is considered the standard variety for it is used as the medium of instruction from Class One to Class Three in lower primary school. It is also used as the language of broadcasting in local FM stations. In addition, it is the variety used in the EkeGusii Bible and hymns. The study reported in this paper is based on both dialects.

EkeGusii entails the culture and beliefs of AbaGusii which define the way of life of the people. As Akama & Maxon (2006) and Monyenye (2004) affirm, the culture of AbaGusii exists before a child is born, a child has to live in it, and leave it behind after death. It is in fact the main carrier of their identity. However, as time goes by, every language undergoes change in vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar and therefore the culture. Most changes occur as a result of language contact which also presupposes some degree of cultural contact, however limited. Today, there are few societies, if at all, in which the influence of other societies is not present. Sandwiched between the Luo, Kipsigis and Maasai communities, the Gusii community has been influenced in speech as a result of interaction with these communities in many spheres especially when transacting business. For Cooper (1989), bilingualism, a state that prevails in the current society serves as an agent of language change. Cooper continues to state that these speakers introduce elements from one of their languages into another thereby influencing monolingual speakers of the second language with whom they are in contact. This can explain the expansion of vocabulary where new words enter a language as a natural consequence of language contact situations.

It is widely recognized that speakers may borrow words from other languages which they have encountered. It may take place in order to obtain new words for genuinely new things, or merely for reasons of prestige (Trask, 1976). EkeGusii has adequate lexical items that are used to refer to the months of the year but, over time, its speakers have adopted 'new' words. This does not, in any way, make the language inferior since language change is part of language development. Anderson (1973) states that every natural language provides its speakers with an entirely adequate system for making any kinds of observations that they may need to make about the world. EkeGusii has an extremely rich system that has allowed its users to incorporate new words borrowed from English, Kiswahili and other languages that its speakers may come into contact with without difficulty.

It is important to note that significant changes in language change begin from the lexicon of a language which is believed to be the main carrier of a peoples' culture. Hock (1986) & Mwaniki (1998) point out that languages rarely borrow basic lexical items which define the core of human experience but rather adopt names for concepts acquired in the course of cultural diffusion. Core or basic vocabulary refers to words that are generally known to exhibit resistance to change than other words in language. However, in EkeGusii, the names of the months of the year seem to give in to change due to influence from languages of wider communication such as English and Kiswahili.

Naming is the basic semantic function of words. According to Lyons (1977), people or adults name things by means of words that denote them. Lupenga (2006) also notes that among many African cultures, a name tells a lot about the individual that it signifies the language from which it is drawn, and the society that ascribes to it. A name may indicate the collective history and life experiences of the people surrounding the individual. Geetaerts (1994) argues that deciding how to name something is a matter of choice. There are various alternatives but the options do not have the same value.

This paper examines the impact of the relationship between EkeGusii and other languages on the naming of the months of the year. It is based on research conducted in February 2016. It also seeks to identify and describe the changes noted in the naming of the months of the year in EkeGusii. Further, it provides a cultural record of meanings associated with the names (native terms) given to the months of the year and this information was used to harmonize the order of the names. In this paper, the names of the months of the year originally used by the Gusii community are identified and their meanings explained. They are referred to as 'native' terms. It is also evident from the study that there are other names that are in use that have originated from other languages i.e. English and Kiswahili. Using information guided by typonomastics which is a category of onomastics, it is evident that names are a direct consequence of the different people, languages and cultures that existed in that particular area. The study of names therefore depends on collaboration between academics and the wider public. This is because everyone uses names so each person has individual insights into how names are used within their own community. Local knowledge is therefore essential to confirm whether or not a particular interpretation is appropriate and explain how the name might have arisen and why.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the history of the months of the year, the original Roman year had ten months as shown in table 1.

Table 1. Original Roman names of the months of the year

Roman Name	English Name
Martius	March
Aprilis	April
Maius	May
Junuis	June
Quintilis	July
Sextilis	August
September	September
October	October
November	November
December	December

Source: Moris (1976) and O'Neil (1975)

There were two unnamed months in the dead of winter when not much happened in agriculture. The year began in *Martius* (March). Numa Pompilius, the second king of

Rome in 700 BC, added the two months *Januarius* (January) and *Februarius* (February). He also moved the beginning of the year from *Marius* to *Januarius* and changed the number of days in several months to be odd, a lucky number. After *Februarius*, there was occasionally an additional month of *Intercalarius* (Intercalendar). This is the origin of the leap- year day being in February. In 46 BC, Julius Caesar reformed the Roman calendar (hence the Julian calendar) changing the number of days in many months and removing *Intercalarius*. When he reorganized the calendar and made it start in January, he kept the old names, apart from one month, which he named after himself. King Augustus came after Julius Caesar and changed the name of another Month-August. In Table 2, O'Neil (1975) provides a summary of the names of the months of the year in English, their origins and what each month stood for.

Table 2. English names of the months of the year

Name	Comes from	Who or what	Why
January	Janus	God of doors	This month opens the year
February	Februo	Purify	This was the Roman month of sacrifices and purification
March	Mars	God of war	Start of year for solders(on fighting during winter)
April	Aperire	Open	This is the month when trees open their leaves
May	Maia	Goddess of growth	This is the month when the plants really start to grow
June	Juno	Queen of the gods	Named after the chief Roman goddess
July	Julius Caesar	Ruler of Rome	He reorganized the calendar
August	Augustus	Ruler of Rome	He thought he was at least as important as Julius Caesar!
September	Septem	Seven	Seventh month (counting from March)
October	Octo	Eight	Eight month (counting from March)
November	Novem	Nine	Ninth month(counting from March)
December	Decem	Ten	Tenth month(counting from March)

Source: O'Neil (1975)

From the history of the names of the months of the year in English, it can be observed that naming is based on a community's culture. It is notable that names of the month had their origin in religion (months named after gods), in rulers and in agricultural practices. There is also evidence that, over time, the names of the year can change. The current study sought to determine how this aspect is manifested in EkeGusii.

Change of original names of the months of the year has also been noted in Kiswahili, a Bantu language spoken mainly in East and Central Africa. According to Stigand (1977), a language so little written as Swahili is unstable in character; as changes occur, old words and forms rapidly pass out of use. This could be as a result of language contact since the language is commonly used for trade where different speech communities are involved. Table 3 shows how the original naming of the months of the year in Kiswahili has changed as a result of language contact through 'borrowing'.

Table 3. Kiswahili names of the months of the year

Name using numerical order	Borrowed name
Mwezi wa kwanza	Januari
Mwezi wa pili	Februari
Mwezi wa tatu	Machi
Mwezi wa nne	Aprili
Mwezi wa tano	Mei
Mwezi wa sita	Juni
Mwezi wa saba	Julai
Mwezi wa nane	Agosti
Mwezi wa tisa	Septemba
Mwezi wa kumi	Oktoba
Mwezi wa kumi na moja	Novemba
Mwezi wa kumi na mbili	Desemba

Source: Kamusi ya Karne ya 21 (2011)

It can be observed that in Kiswahili, months of the year are named numerically. It can also be noted that English names which can etymologically be traced to Latin have been adopted and phonologically nativised to sound like Kiswahili words.

Some of the lexical changes can draw explanations from the traditional view of language change. According to Wardhaugh (2010), the only changes that are important in a language are those that can be demonstrated to have structural consequences. Consequently, over a period of time a distinction between two sounds may be lost in a language, as occurred historically in most varieties of English in the vowels of *meet* and *meat* or *horse* and *hoarse*. Alternatively, a distinction may be gained where there was none before, as in *house* with an [s] but *to house* with a [z]. In this case, a single phonological unit became two, meaning there was a structural split. According to this view of change, it is structural considerations alone that are all important.

Changes are categorized into two: internal and external. Internal change in a language is observed through its consequences. As illustrated in the previous paragraph, such change can be phonological. However, the morphology and syntax of a language may change in the same way. It is possible, therefore, to write internal histories of languages showing the structural changes that have occurred over periods of time through the use of this principle of 'contrast versus lack of contrast. External change on the other hand is brought about through borrowing. Changes that occur through borrowing from other dialects or languages are often quite clearly distinguishable, for a while at least, from changes that come about internally. They may be somewhat idiosyncratic in their characteristics or distribution and appear, for a while at least, to be quite 'marked' in this way (Wardhaugh, 1986). For example, English has borrowed musical terms from Italian such as *soprano* and *tempo*. The Czech language has borrowed a lot of English sport terms such as 'football', 'tennis' and 'hockey' (Vachek, 1986). EkeGusii has borrowed a number of words for this reason. Here are a few examples:

Gloss	EkeGusii
Computer	<i>ekompiuta</i>

Television *eterebisoni*

School *esukuru*

Fromkin & Rodman (1988) add that words can also be borrowed for new concepts or ideas for which there are no local equivalents. For example, some mathematical concepts such as *algebra* and *algorithm* were introduced by the Arabs and borrowed by many world languages. If one is to teach the same concepts in EkeGusii, the words in Arabic will be the most appropriate to use since there are no local equivalents.

The Gusii community is multilingual because of its geographical location. It is surrounded by Nilotic speaking communities such as the Maasai, the Luo and the Kalenjin and a Bantu speaking community, the Kuria. Besides EkeGusii, those speakers who border with other communities tend to speak the languages of their neighbours due to contact situations such as markets, water points, churches and schools. In addition, speakers of EkeGusii come into contact with English and Kiswahili at school. Because of the heavy influence of both English and Kiswahili as languages for wider communication, there appears to be a shift to these languages. Language contact also suggests that there is some degree of cultural contact between the speech communities involved. Of all the sectors of language, the lexicon reflects the culture of the speakers most closely. This study sought to explain the change in the use of terms used to refer to the months of the year in EkeGusii with the meanings of 'native' terms taken into consideration. It sought to answer the question, 'Has cultural change led to language change?'

METHOD

Area of study

The present study was carried out in Kisii County, one of the forty-seven counties in Kenya. This was because the county harbors a concentration of speakers of the two dialects of EkeGusii namely *EkeRogoro* (Northern) and *EkeMaate* (Southern) dialects (Bosire, 1993). The county covers an area of approximately 1317.9 square kilometers with a population of approximately 1,613,221 million according to 1999 population and housing census (CBS 1999). Kisii County comprises thirteen divisions. Out of these, two were selected to represent the two dialects where Marani represented the *EkeRogoro* dialect and Nyamarambe the *EkeMaate* dialect. Although EkeGusii is a largely homogeneous language, the consideration for involving the two dialects was to take care of any variations that may be imminent.

Population and sampling

The target population for this study was all EkeGusii speakers ranging from sixty years and above. Since this was going to be a large group to deal with, the study was limited to a total of twelve respondents. For ethical reasons, the identity of the selected participants was concealed by coding them as Respondent 1, Respondent 2, up to Respondent 12. A large number of respondents are not likely to generate any more

tremendous variations than from a leaner carefully selected group. . The main purpose here was a respondent with good knowledge of both the old and new names of the months of the year in EkeGusii. To come up with this group, the snowball sampling technique using the 'friend of a friend approach' (Labov, 1982) was employed to yield twelve speakers (with six being Ekerogoro speakers and the other six being EkeMaate speakers) of sixty years and above.

Data collection

Two data collection procedures were employed to collect data in this study namely interviews, audio recording and questionnaires. In order to collect data on 'native' names for months of the year and their meanings in EkeGusii, there was need for face-to-face encounters with the respondents in their homes. In ethnographic studies of this nature therefore, the interview method becomes a suitable option (Gilbert, 2008). The interview method allows for probing which is critical in eliciting in-depth data which would have been difficult to get using a questionnaire. This was particularly the case in seeking the meanings of the names of the month. Before visiting the respondents, we prepared an interview schedule to be used as a guide. Next, we sought appointments with the respondents using the same 'friend of a friend' approach where we would ask one respondent to book an appointment from his contemporary for us. Beginning with our first contact person, we visited all the respondents and carried out the interviews at the convenience of their homes. Before each interview, the respondent would be briefed on the objectives of the study and the interviewing procedure. At this stage, we would request the respondents to allow us to audio record the interview to ensure that all important information would not be lost. With their permission, we would request each to sign consent forms and the interview would begin. To make the respondents relaxed, we adopted the interactive method of interviewing where we would ask open ended questions to allow them to say as much of what they knew as possible.

RESULTS

Native and new names of the months of the year in EkeGusii

Data arising from the interview sessions with the respondents in this study indicated that EkeGusii language had their unique ways of naming the months of the year. Data also revealed that the native forms are being replaced by new forms which are mainly a consequence of borrowing. Patterns showing both the native and new forms are summarized in Table 4.

Data in Table 4 confirms that there were two categories of terms used to refer to the months of the year in EkeGusii: native and new terms. The native names which represent the core vocabulary of EkeGusii demonstrate that the language has a naming system which draws from the culture of the people (Akama & Maxon, 2006). This is confirmed by Gibre (2009) who states that names are a direct consequence of the different people, languages and cultures that existed in that particular area. It can also be noted that the respondents provided different names to refer to the same month.

This could be due to the two varieties of EkeGusii namely *EkeRogoro* and *EkeMaate*. Secondly, the free variation could be due to idiolectal differences among EkeGusii speakers. The following section provides a more detailed discussion of the names of the respective months of the year, including the meanings.

Table 4. EkeGusii names of the months of the year

Variants of 'Native' names of the months		Variants of 'New' or 'Borrowed' words	
Esagati		Chanuari	Omotienyi o'motang'ani
Monuguno obarema	Monugu n'obarema	Fepiruari	Omotienyi o'kabere
Egetamo		Machi	Omotienyi o'gatato
Rigwata		Apiri	Omotienyi o'kane
Amaumuntia	Amaumuntio	Mei	Omotienyi o'gatano
Ebwagi		Chuni	Omotienyi o'gatano na rimo or Omotienyi o'sita
Enkoromomi	Engoromoni	Churæ	Omotienyi o'gatano na kabere or Omotienyi o'saba
Riete		Agasiti	Omotienyi o'gatanogatato or Omotienyi o'nane
Tureti ya kebaki	Bureti a' kebaki	Sebutemba	Omotienyi o'kianda or Omotienyi o'tisa
Eng'atiato		Ogutoba	Omotienyi o'ikomi
Egesunte gia Chache	Egesunte Egetang'ani	Nobemba	Omotienyi o'ikominarimo
Egesunte gia Masaba	Egesunte gia kabere / kende	Tisemba	omotienyi o'ikominakabere

January (*Esagati*)

According to the respondents, January was traditionally referred to as either *Esagati*. After twelve months of mowing and toiling among the AbaGusii people, January (*Esagati*) was the month of resting. The people used this month to prepare for the tilling their farms. Respondent 1 points out:

1. This was the month of resting and planning how to start the year. There was no digging or harvesting. The people would detach their hoes from the handles by removing the ropes (*emegoye*) that held them together. The people used this time to replenish their energy in readiness for preparing their land in the coming month.

Respondent 6 adds:

2. It was the month of rest from Agricultural activities. The month was hot and dry. Some called it '*Esagati nyamaagonga*' (the month of crane-like birds). These birds flew in groups past the sky from a place known as *Oyugis* on their way to a region called South Mugirango (*Bogirango Maate*). This marked the end of a season and beginning of another (preparation of land for the planting season).

With globalization taking root, and contact with other cultures becoming commonplace, more and more AbaGusii are venturing into business and formal education. The cultural link to January as the month of resting has therefore lost its original purpose. In effect, languages for wider communication like English and Kiswahili have become sources of loan words for EkeGusii. Accordingly, *Omotienyi o'motang'ani* is a direct translation from the Kiswahili equivalent *Mwezi wa kwanza*. The Gusii people have also borrowed 'January' from English which has been nativised as *Chanuari* in EkeGusii. Respondent 11 explains the shift by asking a question:

3. When not all AbaGusii people are farmers now, and when most are in schools and towns, why would they continue to view January as the month of resting?

February (*Monugu nobarema/ Monugu n'obarema*)

This month was referred to as *Monugu nobarema* or *Monugu n'obarema*. In the traditional society, Being a community that practiced agriculture, the Gusii people used this period to prepare their farms for planting. Thus, *Monugu* was said to refer to the dry period characterized by land preparation activities such as clearing bushes. *Nobarema* refers to 'for those who dig'. Therefore *Monuguno o' barema* means the dry period for preparation of land. As Respondent 8 said:

4. The month of February was generally hot and dry. This was a good period for clearing all the bushes in the farms. Being hot and dry, the bushes would dry in readiness for burning. After clearing the bushes, the land would be tilled.

The expression *Monuguno o'barema* has since been replaced by *Omotienyi o'kabere*, translated from Kiswahili *Mwezi wa pili* and *Fepiruari* - a nativised form of English February.

March (*Egetamo*)

March was traditionally named *Egetamo*. *Egetamo* means 'extremely hot'. It was known to be the hottest season when the farmers were expected to continue with further land preparation which included harrowing and burning the dry bushes cleared in the previous month. Respondent 7 explained:

5. The month of February is an extension of February in terms of dryness and hotness. This is when the Gusii people harrowed their fields. We called this activity '*okobosa*'. This was necessary because the community was known to grow sorghum and millet which required well prepared seed beds. All the dry weeds collected after harrowing together with the dry bushes were burnt in what was called '*chindobe*.'

The name *Egetamo* has now been replaced by *Omotienyi o'gatato*, translated from Kiswahili *Mwezi wa tatu*. Another common name currently in use is *Machi* which is modified from the English form 'March.'

April (*Rigwata*)

The month of April was referred to as *Rigwata*. This month was characterised by first rains which saw the Gusii people sow millet and sorghum. This is explained by respondent:

5. There was no rain in the first two months of the year. The first rains began in the third month (*Rigwata*). This marked the beginning of the planting season and the main activity was sowing millet and sorghum. This activity was referred to as '*Ribusura*'. We would mark where to sow (*gwata*) and where we wouldn't. The seeds were expected to sprout after a few days. The name of this month was also derived from what happens during germination: '*chimbusuro chigwata*' (sprouting of grains) hence the name *Rigwata*.

The 'new' terms which have since replaced the *Rigwata* are *Omotienyi o'kane*, corresponding to *Mwezi wa nne* in Kiswahili and *apiri*, a nativised form from the English April.

May (*Amaumuntia/Amaumuntio*)

The month of May was traditionally referred to *Amaumuntia* also articulated as *Amaumuntio*. *Amaumuntia* was period of a lot of rain and people were expected to weed their crops. This rain would fall selectively in one area and not the other. This is the season which saw weeds competing with the crops and they needed to be removed for a better harvest. Respondent 10 explains:

6. As a community, we specialized in growing millet and sorghum. So, the weeding process was referred to as '*Okwaga enchagwa*'. This was mainly the work of women. Sometimes it could rain the whole day and this interfered with our work but we persevered. Lazy people remained indoors because of the rains. People could even seek shelter in homes which were considered taboo to 'enter' according to the AbaGusii customs e.g. homes of in-laws. Hence the following saying was derived: '*Embura enyinge ekeru abanto bakoumuntia nyomba chia nsoni*' meaning 'A lot of rain which made people to shelter in houses they were not permitted to 'enter' according to their custom.

The rain characterizing *Amaumuntia* used to fall in patches. Despite the rain, people were expected to go out and weed their crops. The 'new' terms which have since replaced the month of April are *Omotienyi o'gatano*, corresponding to *Mwezi wa tano* in Kiswahili and *mei*, a nativised form from the English *May*.

June (*Ebwagi*)

The month of June was called *Ebwagi* in the Gusii traditional society. During this month, the rain had subsided and the weather was mainly windy. The month was also associated with lack of food and the crops had not matured for harvest yet. Respondent 5 explains:

7. June was in fact windy and the name *Ebwagi* was used to describe the movement of the wind. This was the month when crops used to flower. The wind was expected to spread 'omwange' (pollen grains) among the flowering crops. The month was also associated with famine. That is how the saying 'abanchi baregana' (lovers begrudged each other) was coined.

According to Respondent 5, people became mean and could not share whatever little was available even with their lovers. Current names for the month of May are *Omotienyi o'gatano*, from Kiswahili *Mwezi wa tano* and *Mei* from English 'May.'

July (*Engoromoni/ Enkoromoni/ Eng'oromoni*)

Respondents referred to the month of July as *Engoromoni*. Other variants were *Enkoromomi* and *Eng'oromomi*. The variations are associated with the two varieties of EkeGusii and also idiolectal differences. The term *Enkoromomi* was selected as the most probable name for the month of June. Saussure (1959) and Bloomfield (1933) note that it is possible for linguists to observe variation in language, but it is of little importance since it does not change the meaning of the words. The month of July, like that of June was characterized by famine. People were unwilling to share the little they had. Respondent 2 explains this as follows:

8. It was during *Ebwagi* and *Enkoromoni* that a saying was derived, '*Tangori eng'ombe yaito ebiare Ebwagi na Nkoromomi ka'banchi baregana*' loosely translated as *I wish our cow calves during the month of June and July when even friends do not want to see each other.*

This time of the year was bad for this community that relied so much on crop farming for their food. At this point, one hoped that the family cow would calve down so that milk would substitute the food crops which are yet to mature in the farm.

The 'new' names given to this month are *Omotienyi o'gatano na kabere*, *Omotienyi o'saba* which is derived from *Mwezi wa saba* in Kiswahili or *Churrae*, a form taken from July in English.

August (*Riete*)

Traditionally, the month of August was called *Riete*. During this month, the weather was favourable for the maturing of crops. The rains subsided and it was reasonably dry. The maturing crops (millet and sorghum) took a bent shape hence the origin of the name of the month, '*Riete*' which means 'bent'. Respondent noted that:

9. As the crops bent ready for harvest, we would check to ensure complete maturity '*ogokung'unta*' before harvesting.

The 'new' names for August are *Omotienyi o'gatano na gatato* or *Omotienyi O'nane* (*Mwezi wa nane* in Kiswahili) or *agasiti*, a nativised form of August (English).

September (*Tureti ya kebacki/ Bureti a'kebacki*)

September was called *Tureti ya kebacki* or *Bureti a'kebacki* in traditional EkeGusii. September was called *Tureti ya kebacki* or *Bureti a'kebacki* in traditional EkeGusii. This period was characterized by the return of hawks in their hundreds. As Respondent 4 explains:

10. *Tureti ya kebacki* was season when food was ready for harvesting. Eating food prepared from the first harvest was called 'ogotongora.' During this time, birds known as 'Ebibaki'(hawks) would come back from where they had migrated to during the seasons when there was lack of food and they were seen flying in the sky in groups known as *Tureti* or *Bureti* . During the feasts to celebrate the harvest, the birds could snatch away food from the people. They could also snatch chicks. Therefore, people were advised to watch out for them.

The month of September is now referred to as *Omotienyi o'kianda/ Omotienyi o'tisa* which corresponds to Kiswahili's *mwezi wa tisa*. Other people prefer to use *Sebutemba* which has been borrowed from English 'September' and modified to sound like a native word in EkeGusii.

October (*Engatiato/ Eng'atiato*)

The month of October was called *Engatiato* or *Eng'atiato*. This was mainly the harvesting month. As respondent 9 explains:

10. During this month, the people could pluck the ready grains and eat i.e. 'baatia' hence the name *Engatiato* or *Eng'atiato*. The month marked the beginning of the harvesting season.

The 'new' name for this month was *Omotienyi o'ikomi* (derived from Kiswahili's *Mwezi wa kumi*), or *ogutoba* (derived from 'October' in English).

November (*Egesunte Egetang'ani/ Egesunte gia Chache*)

Forms for the month of October were *Egesunte egetang'ani*, or *Egesunte gia Chache*. Chache is an ecological zone that is lower in altitude than Masaba. As such, the temperatures are higher in Chache than at Masaba. Chache harvested earlier and wound their year earlier than Masaba. Respondent 9 explains:

11. The first region or area to harvest was called 'Chache' because it is warmer as a lowland compared to 'Masaba' a highland. *Egesunte egetang'ani* (first darkness) was metaphorically used to refer to the first heavy harvest in Chache region. This also marked the beginning of the end of the year for the people of Chache. But the people of *Masaba* also remained hopeful that they would soon harvest given that their counterparts from Chache have harvested.

November is now called *Omotienyi o'ikomi na rimo* in EkeGusii which has been translated from *Mwezi wa kumi na moja* in Kiswahili. Another name is *Nobemba* which has been modified from the English form November and taken through nativisation.

December (*Egesunte gia Kabere/ Egesunte gia Masaba*)

December was traditionally called *Egesunte gia kabere* or *Egesunte kia Masaba*. This marked the harvesting period for the Masaba people and the beginning of their end year. Respondent 1 explains:

12. Food was ready in the *Masaba* ecological zone a month after *Chache* had harvested. It was therefore second in the order of harvesting hence the name *Egesunte gia kabere* (the second darkness) or *Egesunte kia Masaba* (Masaba's darkness).

With this harvest, like *Chache*, there would be no famine in *Masaba*. Today, December is called *Omotienyi o'ikomi na kabere* (derived from *Mwezi wa kumi na mbili* in Kiswahili) or *Tisemba* (derived from English December).

DISCUSSION

Considering the names used for the months of the year in EkeGusii, it is clear that AbaGusii drew their names from climatic conditions and agricultural activities. The names therefore have a bearing on some cultural aspects of the AbaGusii (Akama & Maxon, 2006; Monyenye, 2004). Using the Linguistic Relativity Theory which is concerned with the possibility that man's view of his environment may be conditioned by his language, the names of the months of the year in EkeGusii and meanings associated with them are a reflection of the Gusii culture and environment. The months of the year in this community were described in terms of seasons. In the naming of these seasons, the weather seemed to be given a lot of attention together with the activities that were carried out.

The study sought to identify and describe the change in naming of the months of the year in EkeGusii from native terms to new terms. The results of our investigation revealed that there were lexical changes in reference to the months of the year in EkeGusii. There was evidence that EkeGusii had twelve native terms that were used to refer to the months of the year. From the meanings of the terms as given by the respondents, it was discovered that the names were derived from agricultural practices of the AbaGusii community. The AbaGusii were predominantly crop farmers and closely observed the weather patterns to determine activities to undertake at particular times in the year. However, due to effects of globalisation, the AbaGusii have come into contact with people from different linguistic, cultural and economic backgrounds. For effective interaction with others, languages of wider communication such as English and Kiswahili are coming out as language of choice for survival in a globalized society. New economic activities such as trade have also come into play. Bynon (1977) states that the notion of 'contact' can be interpreted in a very wide sense, so as to include not only close geographical proximity but also trade relations and other types of cultural

encounters of varying degrees of sophistication. Owing to the 'contact', the naming of the months of the year which solely depended on climatic and weather conditions, has been rendered obsolete. New lexical expressions have been borrowed from English and Kiswahili to replace names which are considered out of touch with the current realities.

The paper has also shown that naming of the months of the year now adopts a direct translation from the Kiswahili nomenclature into EkeGusii. The paper has also shown that EkeGusii borrows words from English and modifies them phonologically to sound like EkeGusii words, a process called nativisation. According to Hock (1986:380) the term 'borrowing' refers to the adoption of individual words or even larger sets of vocabulary items from another language or dialect. When speakers of different languages interact closely, it is typical for their languages to influence each other. Trask (1994) observes that speakers of a language may borrow (that is, copy) words from other languages which they have encountered. Kachru (1994) observes that there are two hypotheses about motivations for lexical borrowing in languages. One is 'the deficit hypothesis' and the other is 'the dominance hypothesis'. The deficit hypothesis presupposes that borrowing entails linguistic gaps in a language and the prime motivation for borrowing is to remedy the linguistic deficit, especially in the lexical resources of a language. This type of borrowing is referred to as cultural borrowing. These words are borrowed from other languages because there are no equivalents in the borrowing language. The dominance hypothesis on the other hand presupposes that one language enjoys a higher prestige than the other, making users of the less prestigious variety to shift to the more dominant one. With English and Kiswahili being recognized as co-official languages in Kenya (Kenya Constitution, 2010), perhaps the borrowed words can have explanation under both hypotheses postulated by Kachru (1994).

Modification of borrowed words has also been explained by Crowley & Bower (2010) who note that when a language copies a lexical item, it reshapes that word to fit its own phonological structure. This means that non-occurring phonemes may be replaced with phonemes that are present in the system of the language that is taking in the new word, and words may be made to fit the phonological pattern of a language by eliminating sounds that occur in unfamiliar positions or inserting sounds to make words fit its patterns. For instance, in the present study, typical examples include '*chanuari*'-/t*fanuari*/ instead of January- /dʒænjuəri/, '*Tisemba*'-/t*isemba*/ instead of December - /disembə/. This is because of the absence of sounds /d/ and /dʒ/ in EkeGusii. The importance of pointing out the difference between the loan word in the target language and in the source language has been underscored by Mohideen (2006) who notes that there is a cultural and historical importance of providing an exhaustive record of the appearance of each loan word in a language because words embody facts of history and record great social evolutions and feelings in nations.

The observation that the native terms used to refer to the months of the year in EkeGusii have been replaced by new terms is explained by Trask (1994) who states that as new words constantly come into use, old words, and old forms gradually drop out of

use. This is a classic case of the evolution of language which Akama & Maxon (2006) fear could spell the endangerment and eventual death of EkeGusii.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this paper was to explore the lexical changes that have taken place in reference to the months of the year in EkeGusii. The data of the study confirmed two categories of lexical items used to refer to the months of the year in EkeGusii i.e. the native terms and new terms. It is important to note that the native terms are not currently in use as the new terms have taken over. The explanation for this is that cultural diffusion has come into effect with the lexical forms of dominant cultures overshadowing those from less dominant cultures. This confirms that language change has indeed taken place at the lexical level in the terms used to refer to the months of the year in EkeGusii.

There is therefore the implication that the core vocabularies used to name the months of the year in EkeGusii are seriously threatened with death unless deliberate efforts are made to revitalize them. As a step in that direction, this paper documents the native terms of the months of the year for reference by posterity and also offers the new names in a bid to explain the trajectory of lexical change. To raise the consciousness of AbaGusii to the original names of the months of the year, there is need to initiate language change programmes in local FM stations. In order to extend this line of knowledge, there is need for more research into the native and new naming forms for days of the week, traditional and modern ways of expressing time in EkeGusii, and how counting is and was done EkeGusii.

REFERENCES

- Abai, J. O. (2013). *The History and Traditions of AbaGusii People of Kenya*. U.S.A: Metro Graphics Inc.
- Akama, J.S. & Maxon, R. (2006). *Ethnography of the Gusii of Western Kenya: A vanishing cultural heritage*. New York: The Edwin Mellen Press.
- Anderson, J.M. (1973). *Structural Aspects of Language Change*. Longman. Great Britain.
- Bosire, F. (1993). Dialects of EkeGusii: Rogoro and Maate dialects. *M.A. Thesis*. University of Nairobi: Nairobi, Kenya.
- Bosire, K.M. & Machogu, G. K. (2009). *Authoritative EkeGusii Dictionary*. Endabasia (1st Ed.). EkeGusii Encyclopedia Project: Kenya.
- Bright, W.O. (1960). Social dialect and language history. *Current Anthropology*, 1, 5-6.
- Bynon, T. (1977). *Historical linguistics*. Cambridge University Press: Great Britain.
- Crowly, T. & Bower, C. (2010). *An Introduction to Historical Linguistics (4th Ed.)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc.
- Fromkin, V. & Rodman, R. (1988). *An Introduction to Language*. 4th Ed. Fort, Rhinehart and Winston, Inc.

- Gibre, Y. (2010). Cultural Contact and Change in Naming Practices among the Aari of Southwest Ethiopia. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 22, 183-194.
- Gilbert, N. (2008). *Researching social life*. 3rd Ed. Guildford Nigel: Sage.
- Giles, H. & Powesland, P. (1975). *Speech Style and Social Evaluation*. London: Academic Press.
- Government of Kenya. (2010). *The Constitution of Kenya*. Nairobi: Government Press.
- Guthrie, M. (1948). *The classification of the Bantu languages*. London: Oxford University Press for the International African Institute.
- Hock, H. (1986). *Principles of historical linguistics*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Kachru, B.B. (1994). *Englishization and Contact Linguistics*. *World Englishes*, 13, 135-151.
- Kenya National Bureau of Statistics. (2009). *Population and housing census*. Nairobi: Government Press.
- Labov, W. (1982). *The Social Stratification of English in New York City*. Washington D.C.: Centre for applied linguistics.
- Longhorn. (2011). *Kamusi ya Karne ya 21*. Nairobi: Longhorn publishers.
- Lupenga, M. (2006). Naming and Linguistic Africanisms in African American Culture. In *Selected Proceedings of the 35th Annual Conference of African Linguistics* Ed. John Mugane, John P. Hutchison and Dee A. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project.
- Monyenye, S. (2004). *Rites of passage: Ceremonies for cultural identities among some Kenyan societies: The case of AbaGusii community of South Western Kenya*. Nairobi. University of Nairobi.
- Mugenda, O. & Mugenda, A. (2012). *Research Methods; Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*. Nairobi: African Centre for Technology and Studies.
- Ogechi, N.O. (2012). Trilingual codeswitching in Kenya. Evidence from EkeGusii, Kiswahili, English, and Sheng. *PhD Dissertation*. University of Hamburg.
- O'Neil, W.M. (1975). *Time and the Calendars*. Sidney University Press.
- Stigand, C.H. (1977). *A Grammar of Dialectic Changes in the Kiswahili Language*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Strauss, A. & Corbin, J.M. (1998). *Basics of Qualitative Research Techniques (2nd Ed.)*. Sage Publications: London.
- Trask, R. L. (1976). *Key Concepts in Language and Linguistics*. London: Routledge.
- Trask, R. L. (1994). *Language Change*. London: Routledge.
- Wardauf, R. (1986). *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.