Lexical Changes in Gichuka (Kenyan Bantu Language) through Obsolescence and Word Coinage

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Abstract:
Obsolescence is one of the ways in which languages change. Obsolete lexical items are words which have been lost in a language and are also referred to as archaic. Languages also change through word coinage. New lexical items are formed to meet new communicative needs. This paper looks at obsolescence and word coinage in Gichuka. Functional theory of language informed the research. The data was collected using interviews and focused group discussions. Secondary data derived from Mwaniki (2004) forms most of the corpus of obsolescence lexical items. The results of the study indicate that obsolescence and word coinage especially in the naming system has taken place in Gichuka. The old naming system for women has been discarded and replaced with a new one. Men's names have also been coined and most of the old ones also retained.

Keywords: *Obsolescence, word coinage, lexical change, Gichuka, functional theory*

1. Introduction

1.1. Obsolescence

According to Monica (2013), words go through three stages in the archaism process. The first stage is when the word becomes rarely used and is gradually passing out of general use. Such lexical items are in the obsolescent stage. In the second stage, the words go completely out of use but they are still recognized by the native speakers. In the third stage, the words are no longer recognizable by the native speakers of the language as belonging to their language and are referred to as archaic. These processes are also acknowledged in Nigel (2011), who notes that words do not suddenly become archaic but go through a process.

The Gichuka words presented in this paper are in the first stage of aging (obsolescent stage). This therefore means that they are rarely used and are gradually passing out of use. The lexical items have not yet become archaic because some Gichuka speakers use them though not in everyday conversations. Members of the Chuka community recognize the lexical items as part of Gichuka lexicon. New generations of speakers do not use these lexical items. All the words are nouns and are mainly extracted from Mwaniki (2004) and some from interviews. In Mwaniki (2004), the words are used by the informants in their oral history narratives.

1.2. Gichuka Language

Gichuka is a language spoken by Chuka people. The Chuka are one of the nine Meru sub-groups. The others are Igembe, Tigania, Imenti, Miutini, Igoji, Mwimbi, Muthambi and Tharaka (Bernadi, 1959). By the inception of colonial rule (1913) the Chuka had established themselves as a people different from those around them in terms of their cultural peculiarity, language and territorial boundaries. Their unity was focused on the Mugwe (spiritual leader) authority. The Chuka live on the South Eastern slopes of Mt. Kenya and cover an area between the Thuci River in the South and Nithi River in the North (Bernardi, 1959).

In his renowned classification on Bantu languages, Guthrie (1967) does not classify Gichuka in any of the groups. Heine and Mohlig (1980) separated Gichuka from other sub- Kimeru dialects and put it together with Kikuyu and Kikamba. Paul (2009) lists Gichuka as language No. 12 among Kenya's indigenous languages. It is classified as Central Bantu in Class E 20 together with Kikuyu, Kamba, Kiembu, Kimiiru, Kitharaka and Mwimbi-Muthambi. The status of Gichuka is described as vigorous (meaning it is in use among all generations) and unstandardized.

2. Word Formation Processes in Bantu Languages

2.1. Theoretical Framework

The Functional Theory of language informs this research. The theory as expounded in (Halliday, 1984; New Meyer, 2001; Ansley & Mackenzie, 2005) is borrowed from the functional approach to language study which holds that linguistic structures can only be understood and explained with reference to semantic and communicative functions of language. The primary function of language is to be a vehicle for social interactions among human beings. Functional

theories of grammar pay attention to the way the language is actually used in a communicative context and not just to the formal relations between linguistic elements.

A functional approach emphasizes on usage, communicative function and social context of language. The functional approach has also been applied in the study of Discourse Analysis (Hengeveld & Mackenzie, 2010; Dik, 1980). According to the Functional Theory, lexical change is a function of communicative choices. Language changes as the needs of its users change and this is especially relevant at the level of vocabulary. Words that are not needed drop out and new words are coined as they are required and names of people and things are switched if they seem inadequate (Aitchison, 1993).

The Functional Theory of language change is relevant for this study because it shows that it is the users of a language who change the language so that it can meet their communicative needs. This is especially so in the case of lexical changes which is the concern of this study. External factors often trigger language change and these are social factors arising from the use of language in society. The lexical changes that have occurred in Gichuka have been introduced by the native speakers of Gichuka in order to meet their communicative needs. There are lexical items that the community no longer uses in everyday speech and new ones have taken their place. The Functional Theory adequately explains why obsolescence and coinage take place from a communicative perspective and that is why it is used in this research.

2.2. Objective of the Study

To collect coined and obsolete lexical items in Gichuka language.

3. Research Design

Broadly, a qualitative research design was adopted in this study. 'Qualitative research includes designs, techniques and measures that do not produce discrete numerical data. More often the data is in the form of words rather than numbers and these words are often grouped into categories (Mugenda & Mugenda, 1999). The historical research method and a descriptive approach were used to collect qualitative data. Historical research involves studying, understanding and explaining past events. This is done in order to arrive at conclusions concerning causes, effects or trends of past occurrences which may help to explain present events and anticipate future events. Descriptive research determines and reports things the way they are (Gay, 1976; Mugenda & Mugenda, 1999). The historical approach is suitable for the study of obsolete words and to gather etymological information. The descriptive approach was used to collect coined lexical items.

4. Population

The target population of this study is all lexical changes that have occurred in Gichuka through obsolesce and word coinage.

5. Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

Purposive sampling was also used to select informants. The researcher identified native speakers who are aged seventy years and above and have lived /worked in the location of the study for most of their active life. Informants over seventy years are able to tell the lexical items that were not there in the Gichuka language but are now a part of the Gichuka lexicon and also identify and explain obsolete lexical items with ease. The people in this age bracket have experienced the changes that have occurred in the language as well as other social changes that may have impacted on lexical changes. This was supplemented with obsolete words gathered from Mwaniki (2004) as explained in Section 2.4. The informants used in the study were able to tell the meanings of obsolete words and they also generated others in their conversations.

Purposive sampling was further used to reduce the informants to seven who would become members of a focused group discussion; three from Magumoni Division and four from Chuka Division based on the population in the Divisions. Three informants (aged twenty-nine, forty and fifty-two years); one from Magumoni Division and two from Chuka Division were added to the remaining seven informants to form a focused group discussion. This is because focused group discussions are effective if they comprise 7-10 members (Kasomo, 2006). The younger members were added to take care of different age groups, and to verify the obsolete items (they confirmed that the items were not familiar to them) and the usage and pronunciation of borrowed lexical items.

6. Research Instruments

The researcher collected data using a guiding card by engaging the respondents in a conversation.

6.1. Validity and Reliability

The informants who were used in the data collection were native speakers of Gichuka. The native speakers of a language have intuition about the well-formedness of language structures. (Radford, 1988). This means that a native speaker has the ability to make judgments about whether a structure is correct or incorrect. In phonology, native speakers have strong intuitions about phonological structure and phonotactics, that is, intuitions about what are possible and impossible sound sequences in a language Native speaker are also able to tell words that have been coined and those that are obsolete in their language.

7. Data Collection Procedures
The data utilized in this research was collected from both primary and secondary sources

7.1. Primary Data
The data was collected in two phases. The first phase involved interviewing respondents. To take care of ethical considerations, the respondents were given all the facts about the research in order to decide whether to participate or not. In total, twelve informants were involved in the data collection. Four informants were from Magumoni Division and eight from Chuka Division. This number is in proportion to the population in each of the Divisions. The informants were engaged in a near- natural conversation by the researcher to extract data on new lexical items.

One informant was interviewed on obsolete words and coined words. Included in this phase is also the data that was collected through participant observation (naturally occurring data). The researcher enlisted the help of two research assistants in data collection to help in collecting naturally occurring data. It is easier to collect this kind of data if more than one person is doing it. The new lexical items were noted down as the conversation was going on and soon after categorized using the guiding cards. Notes were made in the process of data collection because as Mugenda & Mugenda (1999), point out, such notes are important in the process of data analysis.

The second phase involved subjecting the data collected through interviews to a focused group discussion. Every lexical item was verified during the discussion for inclusion in the final data and only those items that were accepted were included in the final data. The justification for using focused group discussions is that they are inexpensive, data rich, flexible, stimulating, recall-aiding, cumulative and elaborative (Punch, 2005; Morgan, 1988). This cannot be achieved through the normal interview where only one person is engaged.

The focused group discussion enabled the researcher to work with a maximum of ten people simultaneously as a moderator and not an interviewee as such. The researcher was facilitating, moderating, monitoring and recording group interaction. The group discussion was also used to come up with any lexical changes that may have been missed out in the interviews, participant observation and secondary data collection procedures and to confirm the pronunciation of the words. The age of the group members was spread from 29 to 90 years. This accounted for the different generations in the last one hundred years. This spreading was necessary because lexical change is a process that takes place over a period of time.

7.2. Secondary Data
Mwaniki's (2004) research was crucial in identifying obsolete lexical items. The research is an oral collection of historical texts on the Chuka people. It is one of the only texts where the earliest history of the Chuka people is documented. The words picked from the text were brought to the focused group discussion for further verification.

8. Results and Discussion
Qualitative method of data analysis was used in this study. The lexical items were categorized into obsolete words, and coined words

8.1. Obsolete Lexical Items

Lexical Item	Meaning
Nkando/n͡kandɔ/	Very strong and impenetrable fences used for defence
Rũkia/rokea /	Clearance around the shamba and fence.
Miano /meanɔ /	Logs secured on tree branches with creepers to form a platform.
Ndara /n͡dara/	Thatching material.
Rong'o /rɔŋɔ /	A type of defence material that the Chuka made for their defence.
Gaarũ / ɣa:ro/	Places where warriors stayed comparable to modern military barracks.
Mũragũ /moraɣo /	An alarm which was sounded in a coded way if an enemy was sighted.
Gaacũnga / ɣacu:n͡ga/	A warrior's dance.
Ĩganjo /eɣan͡jɔ /	Deserted homestead.
Gĩciaro / ɣeciarɔ /	Brotherhood.
Mero / mɛrɔ /	(clothing) – banana barks tied around the teenagers front and back parts.
Kithithini / keðiðini /	A type of clothing – a goatskin dressing for men
Ng'athi /ŋaði /	A loin dress worn by marriageable girls (after initiation) made of animal skin.
Ngaa / n͡ga: /	Fibre dresses worn by older people
Ndaba / n͡daβa /	Fibre dress worn by older people.
Utiko / otikɔ /	A type of food with millet like seeds.

Lexical Item	Meaning
Ntiringi / n̂tiriŋɡi /	A metal device blade fixed on short log and suspended on a trigger device. It would plant the device on the victim when set off. It was used as a weapon and for hunting wild animals.
Ncŭri / n̂cori /	Army of warriors.
Thauthi / ðauði /	A circumcision dance that was performed by men before and after circumcision.
Matĩĩri / mate:ri /	Dancing /meeting grounds.
Kĩgir / keɣiri/	Initiation circle.
Kĩgiru / keɣiro/	A dance performed by elderly women in praise of their name.
Thuro / ðurɔ /	A dance performed by warriors responsible for the initiate.
Mwĩngano / mwen̂ɡano /	Dances performed by uninitiated boys and girls.
Mũgaũ / moɣao /	A dance performed by warriors with 'bells' attached to their legs.
Ncungo / n̂cun̂ɡo /	A dance performed by men and women holding each other and without the accompaniment of drums.
Mwĩnjĩro/ mwenĵerɔ /	A dance performed by men and women with the accompaniment of drums.
Kithege/ keðɛɣɛ /	A guard with thorns and seeds such as for maize and seeds put inside to produce sound.
Nkuanyi / n̂kuaɲi/ and Icembe /ecɛm̂bɛ /	Dances performed by uninitiated boys.
Kĩboiya / keβɔija /	A dance performed by uninitiated boys using a plank and legbells.
Mathithu / maðiðo /	Materials made from banana leaves that people slept on and covered themselves with.
Kĩthiri / keðiri /	Goatskin dress for men.
Kĩganda / keɣan̂da /	Blacksmith's workshop.
Nkome / n̂kɔmɛ /	A council of elders which settled and made judgements. Also referred to a wooden ring worn by Nkome members on the second finger right hand.
Ntuĩko / n̂tuekɔ /	Takeover ceremonies which symbolized the maturity of the youth and allowed them to take their place in their respective moieties.
Mĩũra / meora /	Spear blades.
Iiri / i:ri /	Sacred grove.
Mũthera / moðɛra /	Uninitiated girl.
Mũragi / moraɣi /	A staff of authority.
Kagita / kaɣita /	A drink for women.
Wathi / waði /	A drink for men.
Ĩbĩrĩga / ebereɣa /	Guarded gate.
Makaarĩ / mak:re /	A victorious war song.
Mũrangi / moran̂ɡi /	A pipe for smoking.
Mĩtiro / metirɔ /	Sharpened wooden digging sticks.
Irundairunda /irun̂darun̂da /	Sharpened sticks for arrowheads.
Mĩrundu / merun̂du /	Holes and trenches planted with sharp sticks and covered so that they would not be detected. They were used for defence.
Mũgongo/ moɣon̂ɡɔ /	A council which arbitrated between the old and the young.
Mwonge / mwɔn̂ɡɛ /	A sheep's skin strapped across the forehead and fastened at the back of the head worn by Nkome elders.
Ngaara/ n̂ɡa:ra /	Uninitiated boys.
Kĩthembe/ keðɛm̂bɛ /	An instrument for carrying honey.
Athi / aði /	Bee keepers.
Kigoci / keɣɔci /	A social group for women.
Mĩrũrũ/ meroro /	Grain barrels.
Kĩgĩna / keɣena /	Ceremonial gourd of honey beer.
Iroria / irɔria /	Seers.
Makome / makɔme /	Eggs.

Lexical Item	Meaning
Ĩra / era /	White chalk used for beauty purposes.
Iringo / iriñĝɔ /	Tree top huts for protection equipped with arrows, spears and stones.
Kĩgaanda / keɣa:n̂da	A place where people used to cook – close to modern day kitchen.
Gũtemburia-ñĝ'athi / gotem̂boria-ŋaði /	Splitting ceremony – the short-tight loin cloth a girl wore before marriage was ceremoniously split to signal the beginning of married life.
Nthukio/ ñðokiɔ /	A small ritual gourd carried by the Agwe when they went to Kiriene to get 'ukũrũ' – wisdom.
Mbo / m̂bɔ /	Salt.
Mũnyũ / moɲo /	Salt.
Kĩarago / kearaɣɔ /	An open field for grazing domestic animals.
Mambere /mam̂bɛrɛ /	Chogoria pioneer town and boys' school.

Table 1

The obsolete lexical items listed in 10.1 are gradually not being used because they have been replaced with modern items. For example, the dances, today modern types of music and dance are more appealing than the older ones. The clothing that was worn then is no longer worn today. Some tradations such the circumcision of girls are no longer practised and the word that was used to refer to an uncircumcised girl (muthera) is no longer used. This also highlights the relationship between culture and language in that when a certain cultural practice is abandoned, the word used to refer to it also gradually dissapears from the language. Social changes sometimes occur rapidly leading to the abandonment of a lexical item for another. For example, the word 'mbo'was a coined word used to refer to 'salt'. The word used in its place today is 'chumbi' borrowed from the Kiswahili word 'chumvi.' Before contact with Kiswahili, salt was referred to as mũnyũ / moɲo /.

8.2. Coined Lexical Items

Mwigimbia / mwigim̂bia/	Treasurer
Mũntũ wa njara / moñ̂to wa n̂jara/	Unskilled worker
Cũcũ wa cikati / gitambaa/ ĩrinda/ coco wa cikati/ɣetam̂ba: / erin̂da /	Grandmother
Cũcũ wa mũbuto / coco wa moβutɔ/	Grandfather
Gacinĩka/ɣacineka/	Door bolt
Cabi / caβi /	Keys
Biringi / βiriñĝi /	Whistle
Nyomba ya ngoroba / ɲom̂ba ja ñĝrɔβa/	Storey house
Nyomba ya mbaua / ɲomba ja m̂bao /	Timber house
Nyomba ya ĩbigaa / ɲomba ja eβiga /	Stone house
Ngari ya mwanki /ñĝari ja mwaki /	Train
Mũrimũ wa cukari / morimo wa cukari /	Diabetes
Mũrimũ wa mbebo / morimo wa mβɛβɔ /	Athritis
Mũthanthũkũ/ moðan̂ðoko /	Chickenpox
Ũbere / oβɛrɛ /	Scabies
Mũtũng'u / motoɲo /	Smallpox
Mũtigiri / motiɣiri /	Leprosy
Mũrimũ wa kũgirĩka / morimo wa koɣireka /	Epilepsy
Mũrimũ wa makɛn̂dũ/ morimo wa maken̂do /	Plague
Ndankũrũ/ n̂dangoro /	Tapeworm
Kithũkũ / keðoko /	Measles
Bura / bura /	Utitis media
Mũrimũ wa matende /morimo wa matɛndɛ /.	Elephantiasis
Mũcũkia /mocokia /	Yaws
Mũntũ wa Kũringa mbica /moñ̂to wa ñĝoringa m̂bica /	Photographer
Mwarĩ wa wĩra / Mware wa wera /	Househelp (usually female)
Gĩtambaa kĩa metha / ɣetam̂ba kea mɛða /	Tablecloth
Gĩtambaa kia Kiongo / ɣetam̂ba ɣea keɔñĝɔ /	Headscarf
Kĩgari / keɣari /	Wheelchair
Bũrũbũrũ /boroboro /	Bullets

Table 2

Word coinage in Gichuka is necessited mostly by the need for clarity and the need to diifferentiate things that would otherwise look similar. For instance, as a result of exposure to modernity, different types of houses need to be described. Some items were described according to the work they do (table clothes) or the sounds they produced (bũrũbũrũ, biringi). Gichuka does not have different names to differentiate grandmother from grandfather and children differentiate them using the clothes they wear. The grandfather is 'cũcũ wa mubuto' literally translated "grand of trouser'and 'cũcũ wa 'cikati/ gitambaa/ ĩrinda' which translated literally is grand of skirt/ headscarf/dress.

8.3. Coined Personal Names in Gichuka and Their Etymological Information

According to (Mwaniki, 2004), in the Gichuka tradational culture, people were named after animals and birds. The Chuka were skillful hunters and if a man killed/saw a particular animal or bird, during the pregnancy of a mother, then the child born was named after the animal. For example, if it was a buffalo (Mbogo), a boy child would be called Mbogo and a girl child Ciambogo. If it was a snake a boy would be called Njoka and if a girl Cianjoka. One of the female informants in this study bears the name Ciatharaka (meaning she came from Tharaka).

The Cia-morpheme denoted that the child was female. This morpheme is no longer used in naming female children because it is considered old-fashioned. Also new male names have been coined so that not all men are named after animals.. The coining of proper names is today based on the circumstance of birth or on the envisioned character traits of the person that the child is named after. Not all old male names have been abandoned.

In the list below, I have given a few of the coined personal names. This is not exhausitive list but only a sample because coinage of personal names is a continous process. Where there are two names stroked, the first one is female (F) and the second one is male (M).

Personal Name	Root Word	Etymological Information
Kendi/Mwenda	Enda (love)	Beloved, loved.
Gatugi/Mũtugi	Tuga (take care of)	One who is hospitable/serves.
Kathomi/Mũthomi	Thoma (read)	One who loves to learn.
Kawĩra/Mawĩra	Wira (work)	Hardworking/enterprising.
Kanini (F)	Nini (small)	Small.
Mũnene (M)	Nene (big)	Leader/Big.
Makena (F)	Kena (be happy)	Joy, joyful.
Kangai/Ngai	Ngai (God)	Belonging to God or Miraculously saved (at birth).
Karimi/Mũrimi	Rima (weed)	One who loves farming.
Gakii (F)	Kia (grind)	One who grinds.
Mũkami (F)	Kama (milk)	One who milks.
Kathambi (F)	Thamba (clean)	One who loves to be clean.
Gitonga (M)	Tonga (be rich)	Rich.
Karani (M)	Borrowed from Kiswahili	Clerk (one who has a white collar job). Education domain.
Kagendo/Mũgendi	Genda (go)	One who travels..
Mwambia (M)	Ambia (start)	One who starts.
Mũgambi (M)	Gamba (make noise)	Orator/ Judge / Debator.
Mukuru (M)	Kura (grow)	Firstborn.
Mwiyathi (M)	Atha (rule)	Independent minded.
Karagita(M)	Karagita (tractor)	Tractor(named after the tractor; it was nearby at the time of birth).
Ndeke(M)	Ndeke (eroplane)	Aeroplane
Mũchunkũ	Mwari (girl)	Like a whiteman/ had a light skin at birth / was named after somebody who had a light skin
Kaari (F)	Mugeni (visitor)	Endearing name for a girl child. Visitor (a newborn child is usually
Kageni (F)	Ruga (cook)	Endearing name for a girl child. Visitor (a newborn child is usually referred to as a visitor). One who loves cooking.
Mũrugi (F)	Tuma (sew up)	Literally means'to sew'. The name is given to last- borns or those assumed will be last born.
Mũtuma(F)		
Gĩtaarĩ	Ndagĩtarĩ (doctor)	Doctor

Table 3

The innovativeness in creation of female/male names is as a result of modernity. A change of lifestyle from hunting to modern engagements such as farming and studying, has led to the creation of such names as Murimi/ Karimi and Muthomi/ Kathomi respectively. The etymological information given after each name shows the context/ situation/ character or quality that the name is associated with. Coinage is also a reflection of gender roles and expectations. For example, the name 'Gakii' does not have a male counterpart because men are not expected to grind. Other names are a reflection of changes in the social structure. Whereas in the traditional society people livedcommunally, today there is a lot of individualism leading to the coinage of the name ' Gitonga'(rich) which shows that modernity comes with individualism where property ownership is individual based. The coined personal names reflect a vibrant language which is re-inventing itself in this domain. These coined personal names are derived from verbs and new phenomena showing a shift from the traditional naming system that was based on animals and birds.

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