

A Constraint-based analysis of Kikamba nativized loanwords, 2013

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Abstract:

This work is a constraint-based analysis of Kikamba nativized loanwords. The mechanism used by the recipient language in the phonological modification of loanwords has been explained within the framework of Optimality Theory, a linguistic model which proposes that observed forms of languages arise from the interaction between conflicting constraints. It is through the interaction of markedness and faithfulness constraints that the output forms – the nativized words – are realized. The study has investigated the strategies used by the recipient system, Kikamba, to handle phonologically different words from English. Notably, the recipient language has open syllables and does not allow consonant clusters in the onset. In sharp contrast, English has closed syllables and allows consonant clusters in both onset and coda positions. The phonemic inventories of the two languages also differ considerably. The borrowed words are, therefore, significantly modified in order to conform to the phonotactics of Kikamba. This cannot be achieved without violating faithfulness. The high-ranked markedness constraints in Kikamba trigger the repair strategies in order to increase the well-formedness of the surface forms. The study sought to establish how the grammar of Kikamba resolves the conflict between markedness and faithfulness constraints in the selection of optimal output forms, namely the nativized words. The study utilized primary data which were collected in Machakos District where the subjects are predominantly speakers of Kikamba. Out of a corpus of 200 words collected, 75 were purposefully sampled for analysis. Both qualitative and quantitative methods have been used to analyze the data. The analyses have revealed that in dealing with disallowed codas and consonant clusters, three main strategies: insertion, deletion and feature change are used in order to satisfy high-ranked markedness constraints in Kikamba. In a few instances, however, faithfulness prevails over markedness, leading to change in the phonology of Kikamba. The study has shown that the loanword phenomenon in Kikamba can be adequately accounted for using the Optimality Theory. The findings of the research have implications on the growth and development of Kikamba as the study has addressed phonological modification of loanwords which is one of the means by which languages develop their vocabulary.