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ARABIC LOANS IN EAST AFRICAN LANGUAGES THROUGH SWAHILI: A SURVEY

Abstract

Most people of the towns of coastal East Africa were ancestors of the Swahili of today. The occurrence of Swahili loans in unrelated neighbouring languages, outside Arabic, is quite frequent.

The influence of Arabic loans via Swahili was not confined to East Africa, or to Nilotic and Bantu languages (particularly giKuyu and luGanda), but also to Central African languages like kiKongo, liNgala up to the Sango. This is clear because Islam penetrated mainly and exclusively through Swahili speaking people and not directly from Arabic, so all the words dealing with the new religion, and which so abundantly arrived in West African languages, were not necessarily lent.

In this paper I am presenting a research in progress, I started just one year ago collecting Arabic loans in languages spoken in East and Central Africa, mainly through Swahili. My main object of investigation is to organise a data base similar to what done for West Africa, using the same methodology. Up to now I have been able to consult few dictionaries and other sources on these languages: Acooli, Anywa, Bari, Dholuo, Lotuxo, Madi, Pokot; giKuyu, kiKongo, liNgala, Luena, luNyankole, luNyoro, luGanda, Ngombe, Sango, Shona, Swahili.

1. Influence of Arabic on Swahili Coast

Towards the year 900 Islam won its first firm footholds among the coastal peoples, to begin with, mostly on islands such as Manda, Pemba, and Zanzibar, even if some Swahili histories suggest that Islam had been accepted long before

AD 900.[1] However, only in 1100 the first stone mosques were built. Some of the towns were now growing into city-states. Most of the people of these towns were ancestors of the Swahili of today. They were an East African people of the Bantu language group. But there was a constant arrival of traders and settlers from across the seas, mainly from Oman and the Persian Gulf, who married local women and founded new families.

Most of the Swahili histories seem first to have been written - as distinct from being orally recited - within the past hundred years; much that they have to tell about events in the distant past is unlikely to be exact. The correct conclusion seems to be that Muslim traders, and perhaps a few settlers, did indeed begin coming down the Coast after about AD 650, but that they had little cultural influence on the coastal peoples until several centuries later.

Davidson (1969: 91-92) observes:

So strong was the Muslim accent in this new civilisation, however, that for long it was thought to be Arab and not African. It may be worth noting, therefore, that what happened here was comparable to what happened in Anglo-Saxon England after the Norman invasion of 1066. After that Norman conquest from France, many French ideas and customs were introduced to the Anglo-Saxons. Kings and noblemen spoke French to one another. Great cathedrals were built in styles influenced by those of Normandy. The civilisation of the Anglo-Saxons was greatly modified. Yet this civilisation became not French but English, a blending and mingling of French with Anglo-Saxon. Much the same happened along the East African Coast and Islands. A new civilisation sprang to life. And the Swahili language, for example, developed with the adaptation of many Arabic words and usages, just as the language of the Anglo-Saxons in England developed, with the use of many French words, into the parent of the English that we speak today.

In this regard here few examples of what we have in English: calf/veal, ox/beef, pig/pork[2].

On the other hand the occurrence of Swahili loans in unrelated neighbouring languages, outside the Arabic ones, is quite frequent[3].

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[1] The *History of Pate* [reprinted in English translation in G.S.P. Freeman-Grenville, *The East African Coast; Select Documents*, 1962: 241], for example, claims that a group of Syrian Muslims founded thirty-five towns along the Coast in AD 696, while the *History of Lamu* states that a Muslim city was founded on that island at about the same date (Davidson 1969: 90).

[2] See McCall (1969: 41).

[3] See Knappert (1999: 209): "For example, the word *somo* (to read) in both Alur and Luo - two closely related Nilotic lanuages - might tempt the investigator to enter it in his or her list of proto-Nilotic starred forms. However, its presence in most other East African languages such as Luganda, Kikuyu, Sukuma and Masai marks it out as a loanword from Swahili."

In many ways the Arabs did not create the culture they brought to Africa. They merely handed on what they had previously acquired from other peoples, mainly the peoples of antiquity. That is why we find today in African languages words of such diverse origin as the words for pen, money, army and shirt from *Latin*; for philosophy, paper, diamond and list from *Greek*; for lead, temple, poor man and sulphur from *Babylonian*; for offering, angel, praise and prayer from *Syriac*; for soap, sugar, banana and musk from *Sanskrit* - but most of the words they brought are genuinely Arabic such as grape, copper, cotton (*katani*), ink (*dawati*), kettle (*ibriga*) and gold (*dhahabu*) (Knappert 1999: 213).

The situation of Islam has some features in common with that one in West Africa. In fact it appeared more or less at same time, but meanwhile in East Africa Swahili speaking people were the only ones who were islamised and their language was influenced by Arabic so heavily to reach the 30% of its lexicon, in West Africa different ethnic groups were converted to the new religion and their languages were the medium of spreading Arabic loans among them. So in East Africa the Arabic language influence was via Swahili only into the other local nearby speaking languages, whereas in West Africa it was direct or via other local languages, which got the new words early.

The influence of Arabic loans via Swahili was not confined to East Africa, mainly to Nilotic languages and some Bantu ones (particularly giKuyu and luGanda), but also to Central Africa to kiKongo and liNgala up to the Sango.[4] Of course in kiKongo and much more in LiNgala the influence of Arabic was less important than that from Portuguese, which heavily introduced new words into these two languages. In the field of Nilotic languages the presence of Arabic loans via Swahili is quite remarkable in Acooli, Anywa, Bari, Dholuo, Lotuxo, Madi, Pokot. Regarding the semantic field of loans we see that almost none is dealing with Muslim religion, except Ramadan, because the focus of borrowing is on everyday life. This is clear because the new religion penetrated mainly and exclusively through Swahili people and not directly from Arabic, so all words dealing with the new religion, and which so abundantly arrived into the West African languages, were not necessarily borrowed.

Another difference existing with West African languages is related to the fact that in West Africa so many different peoples were converted to the new religion. Hence their languages were forced to receive so many loans and in a few cases the Arabic loans past into a local language via another one and not directly from Arabic: it is the case for example of the word for *market* which we find in some languages lent through the Kanuri *kasugu* in Hausa *kasuwa*, in Kotoko *gásàgbí*, etc.

As it concerns Arabic we have also to ask ourselves which Arabic. In West Africa if at beginning classical/Koranic was the main source because *mallam*

[4] Where we can find more than 10 Arabic loans arrived through Swahili.

were trying to use only Arabic from Koran, later spoken Arabic (much more from Egypt than from Magrebinian dialects) became the main source for loans. On the contrary in Swahili there was the influence of classical Arabic and Omani Arabic dialects mainly.

1.1. Arabic loanwords in East Africa

In this paper I am presenting research in progress. I started just one year ago collecting Arabic loans in languages spoken in East and Central Africa, excluding the Ethiopian and Somali areas, mainly loans that arrived through Swahili. My principal objective of the investigation is to organize a data base similar to what I have done for West Africa, using the same methodology[5]. Up to now I have been able to collect data by inter alia consulting dictionaries and other sources in the following languages:

Acooli, Anywa, Bari, Dholuo, Lotuxo, Madi, Pokot; giKuyu, kiKongo, liNgala, Luena, luNyankole, luNyoro, luGanda, Ngombe, Sango, Shona, Swahili.

Below I am giving some of the entries more representative, as specimens, I collected up to now,[6] in the shape exactly as they appear in my data base:

siyāsa *administration; politics* (Wehr 441b) **1396**

dholuo Gor	siasa	*politics*
madi Bla	sɨyásà / sɨ́ásà	*politics; manipulation, trick or persuasive charm; inveigle*
swahili J	siasa *n. / adv.*	*oderliness, gentleness, politics*

sāᶜa *moment; hour; watch* (Wehr 441b) **1398**

acooli Cra	cáà	*watch; hour*
Mu	caa	*clock; hour; interval (of time); time; watch*
anywa Reh	càa	*watch; time*
bari Mu	saa, salan	*clock; hour; time (of the day); watch*
dholuo Gor	sa	*hour*
gikuyu Ben	thaa	*clock, watch; hour* (cf. Swahili)
lingala Ev	sâ (sáa)	*watch*

[5] See Baldi (2008).

[6] The work is styled as my dictionary (Baldi 2008) and with the same numeration of the Arabic entries.

lotuxo Mu	asaa	*clock; hour*
	nasaa	*interval (of time)*
	asaa, asaxyen	*time (of the day); watch*
luganda Sno	`ssaàwa	*hour; watch; clock; time of day* (via Swahili)
madi Bla	sáà / sáwà	*time; hour; period; clock, watch; hour (used in telling time, when Arabic numerals are used)*
pokot Cra	sáà	*watch, hour, time* (via Swahili)
swahili J	saa	*time*

sūq *market* (Wehr 443a) **1402**
sûg / sawaga *marché* (JdP 1144a)
sūg *market* (Kaye 49b), **su:g** *marché* (Z&T 136)

acooli Cra	cúùk	*market*
Mu	cuk	
bari Mu	suk	*market*
gikuyu Ben	thoko	*market, market-place* (via Swahili)
pokot Cra	máak^{ó}t	*market* (via Swahili)
madi Bla	sókò / sû	*market* (via Swahili)
swahili J	soko	*market*

kitāb, *pl.* **kutub** *book* (Wehr 812b) **2396**
al-kitāb *Coran; Bible* (Wehr 812b)

acooli Cra	kìtabù	*book*
dholuo Gor	kitabu, kitape	*book*
gikuyu Ben	*gĩ*tabu	*book; pamphlet, exercise- or notebook, magazine* (via Swahili)
luganda Sno	kìtabo	*book* (via Swahili)
madi Bla	kɨ̀tá'bù	*book* (via Swahili)
swahili J	kitabu	*book*

kattān (**kittān**) *linen* (Wehr 815a) **2401**

gikuyu Ben	*ga*tani	*flax, linen* (via Swahili)
swahili J	katani	*hemp, sisal fibre, rope*
	mkatani	*sisal* (*Agave sisalana*)

1.2. Arabic loanwords in East Africa

On the basis of the material collected up to now, we can make some hypotheses, which are quite close, I believe, to what will be the final result. The Islamisation of East Africa, apart from the Swahili coast, is quite recent and it does not affect most of the territory. This implies that in the words related to religion, items in languages, which received Arabic loans via Swahili, are really few. In this respect, the situation is completely different from that in West Africa, where many people, speaking different languages, were converted at different times. The number of loans so is limited to the everyday life and to some items not known ('egg plant', 'basin', 'bullet', 'flag', 'letter', 'paper', 'pen', 'rifle', 'snow', 'soap', 'trousers'); to few big numbers ('one hundred'); to unknown animals ('bear', 'mule') and to time ('minute', 'hour'). As regards the field of religion we only find 'Ramadan' and 'witness'. This is quite understandable for the importance of these two words in relation to Islam: one is the month of fast and the other is not only a legal term, but also commonly understood as a manifestation of being Muslim.

This research is at the beginning and it is not comparable to that, just published, on the same topics in West Africa (Baldi 2008), where the languages investigated were some 130 and here are only some 20 idioms, but nevertheless it can do interesting results.

2. Phonology of Arabic Loans into Swahili

2.1. Phonemes

Arabic has introduced into Swahili some phonemes, realized as follows by the average educated speaker:

/t̲/ [θ] (unvoiced dental fricative): *thabiti* a. (< *ṯābit*) 'firm; brave'; *thelathini* (< *ṯalāṯīna*) 'thirty'; *theluji* (< *ṯulūj* pl. of *ṯalj*) 'snow'; *-thubutu* v. 'to have courage' (< *ṯubūt* 'sureness')

/k̲/ [x] (unvoiced velar fricative): *habari* (< *ḵabar*) 'news'; *hofu / hawafu* (< *ḵauf*) 'fear'; *husuma* (< *ḵuṣūma*) 'dispute';

/d̲/ [ð] (voiced dental fricative): *dhahabu* (<*ḏahab*) 'gold'; *dhikiri* (< *ḏikr*) 'mention of God's name'); *dhiraa* (< *ḏirāʿ*) 'cubit';

/ḡ/ [ɣ] (voiced velar fricative): *ghali* a. 'scarce' (< *ḡālī* 'expensive, valuable'); *ghera* (< *ḡayra*) 'jealousy'; *ghofira* (< *ḡafr*) 'forgiveness'

There is some variation among Swahili speakers in the pronunciation of these loanwords. The borrowed phonemes are most likely to occur in the speech of Muslim native speakers from the coast, who have had some exposure to Arabic, and for whom pronunciation of these sounds as close as possible to the Arabic model is a matter of prestige. In the speech of non-Muslims and nonnative speakers, these phonemes /t̲ k̲ d̲ ḡ/ are generally replaced with /h s z ʤ/ respectively. It is also to be

pointed out that loanwords have reinforced the functional load of /h/, /r/, /ɓ/, /ɗ/, and /š/, which originally had a much more restricted distribution than they do now (Nurse & Hinnebusch 1993: 312).

In highly formal speech, such as a recitation in a mosque, an even more Arabized pronunciation of Arabic loanwords may be encountered, including pharyngealized-velarized ("emphatic") pronunciation of /t/, /s/, and /ð/ with the appropriate allophones of the following vowel, velarized [ɬ], [q] for /k/, dental [t̪] for /t/, use of pharyngeal fricatives [ḥ] and [ʕ]] (Polomé 1967: 45-46; Tucker 1946: 861-867), and geminated consonants (N & H 567; Tucker and Ashton 1942: 99). These do not normally occur in casual speech (Contini Morava 1997: 849). In fact we have: *dubu* (< *dubb*) 'bear'; *hata* (< *ḥattā*) 'until, up'; *Rok* (< *rukk*) 'the gigantic bird of eastern tales'; *budi* (< *budd*) 'way out, escape'; *mwadhini* (< *mu'addin*) 'muezzin'; *hari* (< *ḥarr*) 'heat'; *hasa* 'expressly' (< *kāṣṣ* 'special'); *hati* (< *kaṭṭ*) 'writing'; *bazazi* 'trader' (< *bazzāz* 'draper, cloth merchant'); *hadhi* 'comfortable circumstances' (< *ḥaẓẓ* 'good luck'); *dafi* (< *daff*) 'tambourine'; *haki* (< *ḥaqq*) 'right'; *mdeki* (< *midakk*) 'ramrod'; *ila* (< *'illā*) 'except'; *umati* 'crowd' (< *'umma* 'nation, people'); *ina* (< *'inna*) 'truly'; *bawabu* (< *bawwāb*) 'doorman'; *ubaini* 'clearness' (< *bayyin* 'clear'); but in a few cases, however, double consonants may still be heard: *Allah*, *hatta*, *henna*, *Sunni*, *umma*.

In Arabized speech styles, [ai], [ei], and [au] in Arabic loanwords such as *sháuri* 'intention' may be pronounced as diphthongs, but there is a tendency either to give syllabic value to each part of the diphthongs, resulting in a disyllabic pronunciation ([ʃauri]), or to coalesce the diphthong into a monophthong, e.g., [ʃaix] ~ [ʃeix] ~ [ʃe:x] 'chief' < Arabic *šaix* (Tucker 1946: 870; Polomé 1967: 48). Alan Kaye (as cited by Contini-Morava 1997: 850, n. 4) points out that Omani Arabic, the source for most Arabic loanwords in Swahili, was a colloquial dialect in which many of the pronunciation of these sounds as diphthongs in formal speech is due to influence from the Classical language - the holy language of the *Qur'ān* - rather than stemming from familiarity with spoken Arabic (Contini-Morava 1997: 850).

The presence of the Omani Arabic dialect is attested also by some vowels not existing in Classical Arabic: *dola / daulati* 'government, authority' (< *daula* 'dinasty; state'); *robo* (< *rubᶜ*) 'quarter'; *soko* (< *sūq*) 'market'.

The single Arabic phoneme is rendered into Swahili as it follows:
AR /'/ > SW Ø: *'ujra* > *ujira* 'hire, wages'; *ru'yā* > *ruya* 'vision, dream'; *sawā'* > *sawa* 'equal'. In native and Standard Swahili there is only a case of initial *'a* in Arabic loans becoming *ha-*: *az-zait* 'oil [edible, fuel, motor oil, etc.]' > *halzeti* 'olive oil'. In syllable-final position, the vowel before the /'/ is geminated: *ma'rab* > *maarubu* 'purpose, intention'; *ma'kal* > *maakuli* 'food'; *ma'mūn* > *maamuna / mahamuna* 'reliable'; *juz'* > *juzuu* 'part (especially of the *Qur'ān*)'.

AR /b/ > SW /b/: *bizr* > *bizari* 'spice' *jabal* 'rock, mountain' > *jabali* 'mountain'; *sabab* > *sababu* 'reason, cause';
AR /t/ > SW /t/: *tāj* > *taji* 'crown'; *ḵātima* > *hatima* 'end, conclusion' *mait* > *maiti* 'dead, deceased';
AR /ṯ/ > SW /th/: *ṯaman* > *thamani* 'price, value'; *maṯalan* > *mathalan* 'for example'; *miṯāl* > *mithali*[7] 'parable, example'; *ḥadīṯ* 'Hadith, traditions about the Prophet' > *hadithi* 'story, tale' . This sound is arrived in Swahili through Arabic so many Africans having difficulties to pronunciation, transform it: **AR /ṯ/ > SW /s/**: *ṯumn* > *sumni* 'one-eighth'; *ṯūm* > *saumu* 'garlic';
AR /j/ > SW /j/: *jāh* > *jaha* 'honour, glory'; *najis* > *najisi* 'impure, unclean'; *ḥājj* > *haji* 'pilgrimage to Mecca' There is one case where **AR /j/ > SW /k/, because of the influence of Egyptian Arabic**: *masjid* > *msikiti*[8]; 'mosque';
AR /ḥ/ > SW /h/: *ḥukm* > *hukumu* 'judgment'; *'iḥrām* > *ihramu* 'garments of the Mecca pilgrim'; *lauḥ* 'slate, board' > *laha* 'a sheet of paper';
AR /ḵ/ > SW /h/[9]: *ḵabar* > *habari* 'news'; *maḵlūq* > *mahluki / mahluku* 'human being'; *barzaḵ* > *barazahi* 'interval [from death to the resurrection]'; once **AR /ḵ/ > SW Ø** : *muḵtaṣar* > *muhtasari / mutasari* 'summary, abstract'; in one case **AR /ḵ/ > SW /k/**: *maḵṣīy* > *maksai / mahsai* 'castrated';
AR /d/ > SW /d/: *dars* 'study; chapter [of a textbook]' > *darasa* 'class for reading or study'; *maᶜdin* > *madini* 'metal'; *raᶜd* > *radi* 'thunder';
AR /ḏ/ > SW /dh/: *ḏikr* > *dhikiri* 'mention of Lord's name'; *'aḏāh* > *adha* 'trouble'; *nāfiḏ* 'piercing; effective' > *-nafidhi* v. 'to save, help'; **AR /ḏ/ > SW /l/** only in a very few cases: *bāḏinjān / baiḏinjān* > *bilingani* 'eggplant'; in one case: **AR /ḏ/ > SW /th/**: *juḏām* > *jethamu / jedhamu* 'leprosy';
AR /r/ > SW /r/: *rizq* 'livelihood, subsistence; blessing (of God)' > *riziki* 'means of life'; *marham* > *marhamu / marahamu* 'ointment'; *ziyāra* > *ziara* 'visit'; but once: **AR /r/ > SW /l/**: *rāwaḡa* III v. 'to cheat' > *ragai/laghai* 'a cheat person';
AR /z/ > SW /z/: *zakāh* > *zaka / zakati* 'alms tax'; *ḥuzn* > *huzuni* 'grief, sorrow'; *ḵinzīr* > *hanziri*[10] 'pig'; *ᶜajūz* > *ajuza* 'old woman';
AR /s/ > SW /s/: *samāwāt* (pl. of *samā'*) > *samawati* 'heaven, sky'; *nasab* > *nasaba* 'lineage'; *waswās* > *wasiwasi* 'doubt';
AR /š/ > SW /sh/: *šamāl* > *shemali* 'north; north wind'; *rušwa* > *rushwa* 'bribe'; *jaiš* > *jeshi* 'army, troop';

[7] Johnson gives also *methali*, *mazali*, *mizali*, *midhali*, *misili*, *mizili*.

[8] According to Krumm (1940: 56): "If ڧ is pronounced as k in *meskiti* and *kombora* we may assume Portuguese influence or from the dialect of Yemen".

[9] Among Muslim scholars there is a tendency to maintain the Arabic sound: *ṣabāḥ ʔal-ḵair* > *sabalkheri* 'good morning'; *ruḵsa* > *ruhusa, ruksa* 'permission'; *ḵuṭba* > *hutuba,* (Sacleux 1939: 290b) *khutuba* 'Friday sermon'; *ḵabar* > *habari,* (Sacleux 1939: 261a) *khabari* 'news'.

[10] The standard word for 'pig' in Swahili is *nguruwe*. *Hanziri* seems for me to have a connotation of moral disapproval.

AR /ṣ/ > SW /s/: *ṣadaqa* > *sadaka* ‘alms; charity’; *kuṣūma* > *husuma* ‘quarrel’; *naqṣ* > *nakisi* ‘blemish’;
AR /ḍ/ > SW /dh/: *ḍamīn* > *dhamini* ‘surety, guarantee’; *qāḍin* > *kadhi* ‘judge’; *farḍ* > *faradhi / faridhi* ‘religious duty’;
AR /ṭ/ > SW /t/: *ṭibb* > *tiba* ‘medecine’; *’aṭlas* > *atlasi* ‘satin’; *ṣirāṭ* > *sirati* ‘way, path , i.e. over hell from which sinners fall’;
AR /ẓ/ > SW /dh/: *ẓulm* > *dhulumu* ‘injustice’; *manẓar* > *mandhari* ‘appearance, aspect’; *waᶜẓ* > *waadhi* ‘sermon’;
AR /c/ > SW Ø: *ᶜidād* > *idadi* ‘number’; *sāᶜa* > *saa* ’hour’; *rubᶜ* > *robo* ‘one-quarter’. In native and Standard Swahili there is only a case of initial *ᶜa* in Arabic loans becoming *ha-*: *ᶜarūs* ‘bridegroom’ > *harusi* ‘nuptials, wedding’. In final position of a syllable and followed by a consonant, this phoneme gives in Swahili, very often (but not always, e.g. *raᶜd* > *radi* ‘thunder’) a vowel, which is identical with the preceding vowel: *baᶜda* > *baada* ‘after’; *baᶜḍ* > *baadhi* ‘portion’; *daᶜwā* > *daawa* ‘legal claim’. But **/c/** disappears when followed by a vowel: *daᶜib* ‘joking, jolly’ > *daba* ‘fool, simpleton’; *duᶜā’* > *dua* ‘prayer’; *duᶠa* > *defa* ‘time’;
AR /ḡ/ > SW /gh/: *ḡaraḍ* > *gharadhi* ‘aim, object’; *maḡrib* > *magharibi / mangharibi* ‘prayer at sunset’; *aḡlab* ‘majority’ > *aghalabu / aghlabu* ‘mainly’;
AR /f/ > SW /f/: *fāsiq* > *fasiki* ‘profligate’; *kāfir* > *kafiri* ‘infidel’; *ḥarf* > *herufi* ‘letter’;
AR /q/ > SW /k/: *qabr* > *kaburi* ‘grave’; *nuqṭa* > *nukta* ‘point’; *ḥaqq* ‘truth’ > *haki* ‘justice’;
AR /k/ > SW /k/: *kalima* > *kalima* ‘word ’; *baraka* > *baraka* ‘blessing’; *šakk* > *shaka* ‘doubt’;
AR /l/ > SW /l/: *laun* > *launi* ‘colour’; *jumla* > *jumla* ‘total’; *raṭl* > *ratli / ratili* ‘a weight’;
AR /m/ > SW /m/: *mi’a* > *mia* ‘hundred’; *’amr* > *amri* ‘command, order’; *qalam* > *kalamu* ‘pen’;
AR /n/ > SW /n/: *nīya* > *nia* ‘intention’; *janāba* > *janaba* ‘major (religious) impurity’; *qarn* > *karini / karne / karni* ‘century’; **AR /n/ > SW /m/** in front of *b*: *minbar* > *mimbari* ‘mimbar, pulpit’;
AR /h/ > SW /h/: *haram* > *haram* ‘the Pyramids’; *šahāda* > *shahada* ‘creed-formula’; *wajh* > *wajihi* ‘appearance’;
AR /w/ > SW /w/: *wājib* > *wajibu* ‘obligation’; *jawāb* > *jawabu* ‘answer; reply’; *naḥw* > *nahau* ‘explanation’;
AR /y/ > SW /y/: *yabis* > *yabisi / yabis* ‘dry, arid’; *qiyāma* > *kiyama* ‘resurrection’; *ra’y* > *rai* ‘opinion’.

2.2. Syllable structure

As a rule, Swahili words end in a vowel. Borrowed words ending in a consonant acquire additional vowels, whose nature is determined by the nature

of the final consonant: thus, after labials, *u* or *o* is added; after *t*, *n*, *l*/*r*, *i*, or *e* is added (Myachina 1981: 12): *adabu* 'good manners' (< *'adab*); *wakati* 'time' (< *waqt*); *imani* 'faith, belief' (<*'īmān*); *jahili* 'ignorant' (< *jāhil*); *bizari* 'spice' (< *bizr*).

2.3. Borrowed consonant clusters

If Arabic loanwords contain consonant clusters (like **st**, **lt**, **lf**, or **ks**, **kr**, **kt**) outside the Bantu phonetic pattern, Swahili tends to insert an extra vowel between the two consonants, its character being determined by the same constraints governing final vowels: /u/ is inserted after labial consonants, otherwise *i*: *bikira* 'virgin' (< *bikr*); *fikira /fikara* 'thought' (< *fikra*); *hitilafu* 'difference' (< *'iḵtilāf*);

Sometimes a vowel is inserted that matches the vowel in the preceding or following syllable: *bahari* (< *baḥr*) 'sea'; *huzuni* 'grief, calamity' (< *ḥuzn* 'sadness'); *ibilisi* (< *iblīs*) 'devil, Satan';

2.4. Stress

The general rule is that primary stress is on the penultimate syllable (which may be a syllabic nasal), in polysyllabic words. Some polysyllabic loanwords are exceptional in being stressed on the antepenultimate: *músura* 'almost' (< *nazr* 'little'). Some show variable stress placement: *lázima / lazíma* 'necessity' (< *lazimu* v. 'to be imperative'). Vitale (1982: 327): suggests differentiating between "historical loanwords" and "phonological loanwords"; the latter either are not assimilated (like [áfrika]) or variably assimilated (like [lázima] ~ [lazíma]), and can be marked as such in the lexicon.

3. Grammar

3.1. Arabic article

The Arabic article is nearly never agglutinated in loanwords, differently from what happens in other languages (i.e. Hausa). The examples are very few: *alasiri* (< *ʿaṣr*) 'afternoon'; *alfajiri* (< *fajr*) 'dawn'; *alhaji* (< *ḥājj*) 'pilgrim'; *Alhamdulillahi!* (< *al-ḥamdu lillāh*) 'praise be to God'; *Alhamisi* (< *ḵamīs*) 'Thursday'.

3.2. Adverbs

As distinct grammatical or lexical items, adverbs hardly exist in Swahili. Most of them are derived from nouns, verbs or pronouns. The nonderived adverbs are very few in number, most of them borrowings from Arabic: *abadan* (<*'abadan*) 'never'; *afadhali* 'rather, better' (<*'afḍal* 'better'); *aghalabu / aghlabu*

(< *'aḡlab*) 'usually'; *baada* (< *baᶜda*) 'after'; *bado* 'not yet' (< *baᶜdun* 'then; still, yet'); *dahari* 'always' (< *dahr* 'time; age'); *daima* 'perpetually' (< *dā'im* 'lasting; perpetual'); *dike / tike* (< *bi-diqqa*) 'exactly'; *fauka / foko* (< *fauqa*) 'more'; *ghafula* 'suddenly' (< *ḡafla* 'negligence'); *hadhara* 'in public, before' (< *ḥaḍra* 'presence'); *halafu* 'after a bit'(< *ḵalfu* 'back'); *hasa* 'specially' (< *ḵāṣṣ* 'special'); *hobelahobela* 'anyhow' (< *ḵabal* 'confusion'); *hususa* 'expressly' (< *ḵuṣūṣan* 'especially'); *kadha wa kadha* 'thus and thus' (< *ka-ḏā wa-ka-ḏā* 'so and so'); *kadhalika* 'in like manner' (< *ka-ḏālika* 'so, like so'); *labda* 'possibly' (< *lā budda* 'definitely'); *nusura* 'almost' (< *nazr* 'little'); *salimini* 'safely' (< *salīm* 'safe'); *sana* 'very much' (< *sanā* 'brilliance'); *sawia* 'then' (< *sawīya* 'equality'); *tasihili* 'quickly' (< *tashīl* 'facilitation'); *wahedu* 'alone' (< *wāḥid* 'one; sole'); *zamani* 'formerly' (< *zamān* 'time').

3.3. Class system

Swahili inflection is characterized by the Bantu class-prefix system. Many Arabic loanwords were included in a specific Swahili class because they fitted its semantic function and not according to their initials, which by chance could be similar to Swahili prefixes. In fact we have in class 6: *mahari* 'dowry' (< *mahr*). Other Arabic loans with the initial {ma} have been interpreted as forms with the zero allomorph of the {n} prefix of classes 9 and 10 (Polomé 1967: 187): *maharazi* 'shoemaker's awl' (< *maḵāriz* pl. of *miḵraz* 'awl'); *marijani* 'red coral' (< *marjānī*); *mansuli* 'woolen material' (< *musūḥ* pl. of *misḥ*); *majuni* 'intoxicating sweetmeat containing Indian hemp' (< *maᶜjūn* 'paste, cream'); *magharibi* 'sunset, west' (< *maḡrib*); *mashariki* 'east' (< *mašriq*); *maskini* 'poor' (< *miskīn*); *majununi* 'buffoon' (< *majnūn*). Classes 9 and 10 contain many nouns of foreign origin, mainly Arabic, and being loanwords, these do not follow the rules of phonetic change in Swahili. Many such words have no prefix at all: *barua* 'letter' (< *barwa* 'waste, scrap'); *dawa* 'medicament' (< *dawā'*); *jinsi* 'kind, sort' (< *jins*); *daraja* 'bridge; rank' (< *daraja* 'rank'); *kofia* 'fez, hat' (< *kūfīya* 'kaffiyeh'); *safari* 'journey' (< *safar*); *saa* 'hour' (< *sāᶜa*); *sahani* 'plate' (< *ṣaḥn*); *sabuni* 'soap'(< *ṣābūn*). Sometimes, Arabic loans were included in a noun classe because of their initial consonants, which coincidentally fitted the Swahili system (class 7), e.g. *kitabu* 'book', pl. *vitabu* (< *kitāb*).

3.4. Conjunctions

In Swahili there are no original Bantu words functioning as conjunctions except *na*, which is composed of the *-a* of relationship and *n-* of association. There are, however, various ways of joining words and sentences (Ashton 1947: 197). Some are borrowings from Arabic: *ama ... ama* 'either ... or' (< *a-mā* 'or?'); *au* 'or' (< *'au*); *bali* 'but' (< *bal*); *ila* 'except' (< *'illā*); *ili* 'in order that' (<

ᶜ*alā* 'according to'); *kama* 'if, whether' (< *ka-mā* 'as, equally, likewise'); *kusudi* 'with the object of' (< *qaṣada* v. 'to intend'); *lakini* 'but, nevertheless' (< *lākin* 'however, yet, but'); *wala* ... 'neither ... nor' (< *wā-lau* 'even if, even though').

3.5. Numerals

Of the first ten numerals three are of Arabic origin: *sita* '6', *saba* '7', *tisa* '9'. The numerals 11 to 19 coexist with the Bantu terms, but the numerals from 20 to 90, as well as the word for 'one hundred' (*mia*) and 'one thousand' (*elfu*) are all of Arabic origin. In such cases there is no concord.

3.6. Prepositions

In Swahili there are no original Bantu words functioning as prepositions (Ashton 1947: 195), but some Arabic loanwords function as preposition: *bila* 'without' (< *bi-lā*); *hata* 'until, up to' (<*ḥattā*).

3.7. Verbs and verbal nouns

Verbs and verbal nouns of Arabic origin generally show a difference in vowel quality, because they were adopted directly from the corresponding Arabic forms: *abudu* v. 'to worship' (< ᶜ*abada*), *ibada* 'worship' (< ᶜ*ibāda*); *hasibu* v. 'to count' (< *ḥasaba*), *hesabu* 'arithmetic' (< *ḥisāb*); *amini* v. 'to believe' (< *'amina*), *imani* 'faith' (< *'īmān*). On the other hand, however, nouns may also be derived from Arabic verbs in a Bantu manner: *safiri* v. 'to travel' (< *sāfara*) > *msafiri* 'a traveller'. This account for synonymous like *hasidi / husudu* v. 'to envy' (< *ḥasada*) > *uhasidi / husuda* 'envy'.

3.8. Uninflected Loan Words

These are mostly loanwords from Arabic. The following few examples, with nouns from different classes, should be sufficient to show the absence of concord for loans in adjectival position (Ashton 1947: 49-50): *mtu hodari* 'a clever man', *mti hodari* 'strong, hard wood'; *watu tele* 'many people', *maji tele* 'plenty of water'; *chumba safi* 'a clean room', *maneno safi* 'a straightforward statement'; *mwezi kamili* 'a full month', *maneno haba* 'a few words'. Many of these words have abstract nouns corresponding to them: ***u***-*hodari* 'courage, capability'; ***u***-*safi* 'cleanliness, purity, honesty'; ***u***-*kamili* 'completeness'; (***u***-)*haba* 'scarsity, rarity' (all in class 11); *tele* 'abundance, plenty' (in class 9).

4. Semantic analysis

Arabic loanwords were included in all domains of the Swahili cultural lexicon (for more details, see Baldi 1988:10-53). Some examples are:
i. Nature: *hewa* (< *hawā'*) 'air'; *nuru* (< *nūr*) 'light'; *Thurea* (< *ṯurayyā*) 'Pleiades'; *ardhi* (< *arḍ*) 'earth'; *zebaki* (< *zi'baq*) 'quicksilver'; *zafarani* (< *zaᶜfarān*) 'saffron'; *hudhud* (< *hudhud*) 'hoopoe';
ii. Man as a physical being: *jamala* (< *jamāl*) 'beauty'; *raha* (< *rāḥa*) 'rest, repose'; *barasi* (< *baraṣ*) 'leprosy'; *haraka* 'haste' (<*ḥaraka* 'movement'); *sahani* (<*ṣaḥn*) 'dish, plate'; *juba* (< *jubba*) 'jubbah'; *hema* (< *ḵaima*) 'tent';
iii. Man as a spiritual being: *bayana* (< *bayān*) 'explanation'; *rehema* (< *raḥma*) 'mercy'; *muhali* (< *muḥal*) 'impossible, absurd'; *duni* (< *dūn*) 'low, inferior'; *maana* (< *maᶜnā*) 'meaning, sense'; *jarida* 'journal' (< *jarīda* 'newspaper'); *hekaya* (< *ḥikāya*) 'story, tale'; *Jahim* (< *jaḥim*) 'sixth of the Muslim hells';
iv. Man as a social being: *ajali* 'accident' (< *ajal*) 'deadline'; *dhuria* (< *ḏurrīya*) 'descendant'; *taa* (< *ṭāᶜa*) 'obedience';
v. Social organization and politics: *asili* (< *aṣl*) 'origin'; *tuhuma* (< *tuhmā*) 'suspicion'; *alamu* (< *ᶜalam*) 'flag'; *daftari* (< *daftar*) 'register'; *ala* (< *'āla*) 'tool; *badala* (< *badal*) 'substitute'; *himila* (< *ḥiml*) 'load';
vi. Natural laws: *jinsi / jinsi* (< *jins*) 'kind'; *sudusu* (< *suds, sudus*) 'one-sixth'; *mahali* (< *maḥall*) 'space'; *saa* (< *sāᶜa*) 'hour';
vii. Interjections and conjunctions: *Bismillahi* (< *bi-smi llāhi*) 'in the name of God'; *mathalan* (< *maṯalan*) 'for example'; *au* 'or' (< *'au*).

5. Swahili as a medium of spreading Arabic Loans

Swahili not only received Arabic loans but it was also a donor language. Many languages in the region, both Bantu and non-Bantu, received Arabic loans through Swahili:

Arabic *sāᶜa* 'while; hour; timepiece' > Swahili *saa* 'time; watch' > liNgala *sâ (sáa)* 'watch' > Sango *sáà* 'watch';

Arabic *māl* 'money' > Swahili *mali* 'wealth' > Ila *madi* 'money'; Ndonga *oshimaliwa* 'money' (via Nama); Shona *mari* 'money (*cash*)'; isiXhosa *imali* 'money';

Arabic *qahwa* 'coffee' > Swahili *kahawa* 'coffee' > liNgala *káwa* 'coffee' > Sango *káwà* 'coffee';

Arabic *qarṭas* 'paper' > Swahili *karatasi* 'paper, a piece of paper' > Acholi *kàrtacì* 'sheet of paper';

Arabic *kūfīya*'kaffiyeh' > Swahili *kofia* 'fez' > Acholi *kòfìà* 'tarboush'.

6. Conclusions

Swahili has been heavily influenced by Arabic with a great number of loans, which sometimes themselves passed into other languages. Even the phonetic and the grammar of Swahili has been influenced by this language, as it had been demonstrated. Only the syntax was almost untouched by the Arabic influence, except maybe the use of *kama*, which has a pleonastic use: *Kama mpishi akipata samaki asinunue nyama* 'If the cook gets fish he is not to buy meat'; *Kama jua lingetoka mihindi ingepona* 'If the sun would come out the maize would be saved'; *Kama nyama haipatikani, nunua samaki* 'If meat is unobtainable, buy fish'; *Kama wazee wanavyosema* 'As the old men say'. In fact I believe that Swahili has the means, through its aspect tenses system, to give the right idea of what it wants likes to express and the use of *kama* is only vestiges of a strong Arabic influence on the language, which went beyond the simple level of lexicon.

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