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‘Stressed and sexy’: lexical borrowing in Cape Town Xhosa

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Codeswitching by African language speakers in South Africa (whether speaking English or the first language) has been extensively commented on and researched. Many studies analyse the historical, political and sociolinguistic factors behind this growing phenomenon, but there appears to be a little urgency about establishing a database of new lexicons to inform first-language interventions in education and public information programmes. In this article I use research conducted in three townships in Cape Town to focus on one aspect of codeswitching, namely lexical borrowing, in one of South Africa’s languages, Xhosa. The central argument tested in this article is that lexical borrowing in Xhosa is driven by a need to simplify expression by using syllabically shorter English words. I test this hypothesis by (a) establishing the average syllabic difference between Xhosa and English; (b) seeking lexical responses to a set of pictures; (c) analysing lexical borrowing in the main Xhosa radio station. In addition, the article uses the data collected to elucidate the link between the Xhosa speakers’ lexicon and the concepts it needs to describe, and then suggests further possible reasons for the choice of English over Xhosa.

Keywords: Xhosa; South Africa; township; English; lexical borrowing; codeswitching; language in education; mother-tongue education; slang; urban varieties; language death; vocabulary; translation; bilingualism; assimilation; convergence; language dominance; syllabic economy; codemixing; language attitudes; language change

Introduction

Recent studies on the codeswitching behaviour of South Africa’s African language speakers highlight the influence of the first language on English (de Klerk, 2002b, 2003, 2006), as well as the phenomenon of multilingual urban varieties of African languages developing in order to reflect new realities, new community relationships and new identities (Cook, 2009; Finlayson & Slabbert, 1997; Koopman, 2000; Slabbert & Finlayson, 1999, 2002). Rudwick (2005, p. 307) has noted the context dependency of informal varieties, while Lafon (2005, p. 134) describes the development of new language forms in Gauteng as forming a ‘continuum situation: tsotsitaal, isCamtho, and code-switching’.

In her article on the use of standard and non-standard varieties of Tswana in South African schools, Cook (2009, p. 96) argues that ‘the distinction between standard and non-standard varieties of African languages provides a critical lens into

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the process of identity formation, ideological tensions and social change in post-apartheid South Africa’.

In my experience, African language teachers generally regard any questioning of the ‘standard’, static varieties of African languages as tantamount to racism and as disrespectful of the culture. Unfortunately, such attitudes have contributed to students losing interest in languages, academic departments of African languages shrinking, and English gaining dominance in society.¹

The research conducted for this article is informed by these important studies and by my own experiences, and takes into account the ideological tensions that exist, but its primary focus is on the borrowing of single lexemes. The questions that I wanted answered were:

- Do near-monolingual Xhosa speakers only use English when there is a lexical gap for technical, specifically urban, phenomena and commodities, or are there also instances of conceptual gaps, where a one-word correlation for an emotion, attribute or physical action is difficult or impossible to find in the first language?
- Could it be that Xhosa speakers are sometimes just looking for the shortest word, the easiest one to pronounce? Poplack, Sankoff and Miller (1988, p. 60) refer to the possibility of speakers opting for ‘morphologically simple lexical items over more complex ones to express the same referent’, while Shin (2010, p. 49) argues that ‘longer words in the recipient language will tend to be abandoned and replaced by shorter ones from the donor language’. The adoption of the English counting system in Xhosa is a good example of this, as is the frequent use of English adjectives where Xhosa might need a longer descriptive phrase (e.g. *u-sexy* instead of *unomtsalane kubantu besinye isini* to mean ‘you are sexy’).
- Are Xhosa speakers in the Western Cape less concerned with identifying themselves as Xhosa and more eager to identify themselves as ‘urban’ through the language they use?

This research was also prompted by my belief that it is important to establish a database of new township lexicons – not only for further linguistic research and scrutiny, but also to augment the language used in first-language interventions in public and educational domains, taking into account that, as Mesthrie (2008, p. 332) warns, a borrowed word only gains meaning from the conceptual system of the borrowing language. It is my argument that terminology used, for example, to explain technical and mathematical processes and objects should not only be devised and decreed by language boards and language specialists alone, but should also be derived from the way people speak (Slabbert & Finlayson, 1999). This should focus attention on what Mesthrie (2008, p. 332) refers to as ‘translatability’ rather than ‘translation’.

The Xhosa language

Xhosa (known by its speakers as *isiXhosa*) is the second-largest language group in South Africa, spoken by 17% of the population, and is the first language of the nation’s most famous man, Nelson Mandela. It is closely related to Zulu, the language of the majority of South Africans (23%). It is the majority language in the Eastern Cape province and the third-largest language in the Western Cape province. Statistics show that between 1996 and 2001 the proportion of Xhosa speakers in the Western Cape increased.

The most frequently spoken first home language in Western Cape in both census years [1996 and 2001] was Afrikaans. It was spoken by 2,3 million people in 1996, increasing to 2,5 million in 2001. This was followed by English, spoken by 795 000 in 1996 and 875 000 in 2001. However in both instances these numbers represented a drop in the proportion of the population speaking these languages. The third most frequently spoken first home language was isiXhosa, spoken by 748 000 in 1996, increasing to 1,1 million in 2001 (Statistics South Africa, 2005).

Xhosa under threat?

In the introduction to *The Greater Dictionary of Xhosa Volume 3: Q–Z* the editor writes:

Some years after he had completed the manuscript of his Xhosa-English dictionary, Dr Albert Kropf was persuaded to prepare it for publication. He relates the event as follows: 'At the United Missionary Conference held in King William's Town in 1889, it was proposed by the late Mr Andrew Smith that "the lexicon should be printed, if only as a memorial of the Xhosa language which would soon be supplanted by English"' (Pahl, Pienaar, & Ndungane, 1989, p. xxxii).

The editor goes on to remark that this 'pessimistic prediction' has not been realised and notes that Xhosa 'sprouts new words and expressions to accommodate new concepts and cultural items' (Pahl et al., 1989, p. xxxii).

While this is true (and the production of a three-volume dictionary of Xhosa is proof of the language's endurance), Kropf's grim forecast has nevertheless been echoed by contemporary commentators who believe that South Africa's African languages are in danger of obscurity and an early death. Here are just a few headlines and comments that have appeared in the South African press in recent years:

Call me a coconut but African tongues are destined for obscurity

African languages will one day become an arbitrary subject offered at universities, studied only by the eccentric bead lover and a few curious others (Matlwa, 2007).

School kids reject African languages

The overwhelming majority of SA's school pupils are not interested enough in indigenous African languages to study them at school (Govender, 2008).

English must not stifle 10 other tongues

'Languages die without use; languages can disappear,' said Minister of Education Naledi Pandor, as she spoke to hundreds of pupils and teachers at the second National Schools' Language Festival (Hart, 2008).

Experts worried about language 'genocide'

Language experts are worried about the 'genocide' of certain African indigenous languages in South Africa.) (Mchunu, 2006).

Most speak Zulu at home, English at work, says survey

Warning that African Languages face extinction (Ntshingila, 2006).

Motivation behind a lexical survey***Practical reasons***

Xhosa-speaking people in Cape Town's townships and predominantly Xhosa-speaking suburbs are, contrary to the gloomy newspaper predictions, not rejecting their language² – 97% of Langa residents, according to the national census of 2001, have Xhosa as their first language³ – nor is the language facing extinction. We should therefore channel the negative energy behind these bleak prophecies into a positive energy aimed at researching the extent to which the language is changing. New varieties of Xhosa require careful documentation and linguistic description. This new information should help inform language teachers, researchers and translators, among others, who have largely ignored the fact that spoken Xhosa is rapidly diverging from the 'standard'.^{4,5}

Monica Hendricks, who surveyed the teaching and learning of Xhosa as a first language in 13 schools in the Eastern Cape, discovered that:

[t]he overwhelming majority of respondents believed that it was important to study isiXhosa at school, but reported serious differences between the standard, 'deep' dialect of isiXhosa taught in school and that commonly used outside of school. Some learners indicated that they found learning English, an additional language, easier than learning their home language (Hendricks, 2006, p. 33).

The codification and statistical analysis of new lexicons should encourage reluctant language purists to acknowledge them as meaningful and acceptable, although this might be a difficult task, as Cook (2009, p. 104) has observed with regard to borrowed words in Tswana:

Setswana teachers not only label these words 'incorrect' but feel they symbolize a dangerous trend towards abandoning or contaminating Setswana culture and identity.

While many educationalists and language activists (Alexander, 2001; Desai, 2001) argue for first-language instruction in African languages, others have pointed to the problems of this approach. As Gerda de Klerk (2002a, p. 38), writing on mother-tongue education in South Africa, observes:

Despite the ethnolinguistic zoning of the country, many South Africans, especially those in urban areas, are highly multilingual, and it is often difficult to identify a single first language for a particular child or assess children's proficiencies in the languages they speak by the time they enter school.⁶

Teaching mathematics via Xhosa lexical items seldom heard at home or in the community is no less confusing to learners than introducing them to English terminology that they will have to learn later anyway, and may already have a better understanding of. Cook (2009, p. 101) argues that the standard African language may in fact be a non-native dialect to students.⁷

As Joanne Nurss, a researcher in adult basic education, observes:

In South Africa, many adults do not live and work in a highly literate environment and are not exposed to a great deal of meaningful print in their mother tongue. In fact, they

may see more print in English (e.g., at work, on signs, on television, in shops) than in their mother tongue (1998, p. 113).

The issue of how best to represent scientific terminology in African languages has been studied by Wildsmith-Cromarty (2008), who, while not advocating the use of non-standard varieties in the development of African language scientific discourse, nevertheless acknowledges that sometimes borrowings were preferred by back-translators who found the coined words 'incomprehensible' (Wildsmith-Cromarty, 2008, p. 158). Wildsmith-Cromarty notes that this finding contrasts with Dlodlo's argument that 'phonetically-modified borrowings from non-indigenous languages . . . are meaningless in the daily-life experiences of African-language speakers' (Wildsmith-Cromarty, 2008, p. 158).

Webb (2008) also concedes that it is unlikely that African languages will be used in higher education in South Africa because 'they are not used to any significant extent in primary and secondary education' (Webb, 2008, p. 402).

Theories on lexical borrowing

Weinreich (1953, p. 56) has stated that 'the vocabulary of a language, considerably more loosely structured than its phonemics and its grammar, is beyond question the domain of borrowing *par excellence*'. Furthermore, he asserts that loanwords cannot be considered mere additions to a language, because they also have an impact upon the linguistic system. Brown (2003) refers to studies on language contact, citing a 1950 analysis by Einar Haugen, who came up with the notion of a 'borrowing hierarchy', with nouns being the category most frequently borrowed and interjections the least. The hierarchy proposed for borrowing was: nouns – verbs – adjectives – adverbs – prepositions – interjections. The data collected in this study will test whether this hypothesis is true for Xhosa, or whether a trend towards borrowing non-nominal categories is also apparent.

Romaine (1989, p. 55) notes that loanwords are frequently used by people who immigrate to a new area and start to learn the dominant language of that area.

When moving to a new setting, speakers will encounter a variety of things which are specific to the new environment or culture and will adopt readily available words from the local language to describe them.

But can 'language contact' and 'new environments' explain every aspect of lexical borrowing? Heredia and Altarriba (2001) refer to research indicating that retrieving a word from a second language is more time-intensive than retrieving a word or concept from the first language, and therefore ask the question, 'Why do bilinguals code-switch?' Data collected in this survey of lexical borrowing among Xhosa speakers in Cape Town would suggest that the speakers themselves regard the borrowed word not as borrowed, but rather as a lexical item that forms part of the first language, or, as Eastman (1992, p. 3) calls it, 'the mental lexicon'. It is the traditional or standard word that is further out of reach for many Xhosa speakers than the borrowed word.⁸

Eastman (1992, p. 36) argues that borrowed forms (B forms) are different from codeswitching forms (CS forms) because they have become part of the mental lexicon of the Matrix Language (ML), the dominant language of the speaker. She concludes

that numbers in Shona (one of Zimbabwe's official languages) are incontrovertibly B forms.

In the Zimbabwe corpus, analysis showed that of all the numbers used by interviewees ... 86% were in English (Eastman, 1992, p. 36).

Data collected in this study indicate that numbers in Xhosa, like Shona, are predominantly expressed in English, the counting system in the African language proving more difficult (see Mesthrie, 2002, p. 204) and less direct.

While collecting the data for this study I was surprised at how many participants seemed to know that there was a Xhosa word for 'weather' but could not remember it (*Eish, lithini ke ngoku elaa gama for iwetha?* 'Hey, what is that word again for weather?').

Heredia and Altarriba (2001, p. 165) argue that frequency of the English form can be explained as follows:

This inability to remember is reminiscent of the classic tip-of-the-tongue (TOT) phenomenon, in which people are sometimes unable to remember information that they know. ... The reason for the difficulty is not that he does not know the correct word but that he does not use this word frequently. Switching to English makes it easier and faster to retrieve the word. Thus code-switching may be a problem of retrieval affected by a combination of closely related factors such as language use and word frequency.

They refer to Spanish–English bilinguals in South Texas exhibiting English interference when communicating in Spanish, but little or no interference from Spanish when communicating in English. So what happens when bilingual Xhosa speakers communicate in English, and what insights does this afford the present study? Vivian de Klerk's (2006) study of a corpus of the English of 326 Xhosa bilinguals reveals a large number of English nouns being used with Xhosa prefixes (e.g. *ifuture, iyouth, icrime*). It notes that the Xhosa words that *were* used 'tended to refer to cultural traditions or items for which no English equivalent exists' and that many of the single-word codeswitches were used merely to 'affirm solidarity and assert identity rather than to signal difficulty in the target language' (de Klerk, 2006, p. 611). In an earlier study Vivian de Klerk (2000) concedes, however, that the higher the educational background, the more likely a speaker is to favour assimilation and a shift to English.

The Xhosa speakers surveyed in this study, however, are economically disadvantaged⁹ and only nominally bilingual, many having migrated from the predominantly Xhosa-speaking Eastern Cape province to the Western Cape province in the past five years, and use English mainly at work.^{10,11}

The fact that these people settle in the Xhosa-speaking suburbs and townships of Cape Town reinforces the first-language and group solidarity in these areas, although they use a variety of language there that identifies them as being urban and modern rather than agrarian and old-fashioned (see Cook, 2009, pp. 101–109).

The data in this study indicate that lexical borrowing from English by Xhosa speakers is becoming more widespread, even in preference to words that are heard frequently in the first tongue. Words such as *imozulu* 'weather' and *izithuthi* 'transport' are the official terms used on *UMhlobo Wenene* (the main Xhosa radio station) and in Xhosa news programmes on television (although chat shows on both

prefer the English borrowings). Why are Xhosa speakers using English even for these terms, and need we fear that the language is indeed facing genocide in the form of language convergence?

Fuller (1996, p. 497), discussing the use of English conjunctions (also a widespread phenomenon in Xhosa) in Pennsylvania German, argues:

Such phenomena indicate that the status of lexical items as borrowings does not preclude them from playing a role in convergence in the same way that code-switching does. . . .

Thus my claim is not that code-switching leads to convergence but that the integration of lexical items from two systems, whether they are deemed code-switches or borrowings, can be analyzed according to the same principles, and this integration may lead to a turnover in the ML (1996, p. 497).

Heredia and Altarriba (2001, p. 167) claim that it is ultimately the dominant language that determines the lexical item chosen.

In short, we suggest that language dominance plays an important role in how bilinguals access their two languages. We argue that bilingual lexical representation is not a static but a dynamic representational system in which the first language can fall in strength while the second language becomes the dominant language.

In all three areas surveyed for this study, the dominant language of the in-community is Xhosa, but English is the dominant language in the places of employment and economic activity (shopping centres, transport systems, government offices) that lie outside the community living area: Fish Hoek (for Masiphumelele), Hout Bay (for Imizamo Yethu) and Cape Town city, Rondebosch, Mowbray and Pinelands (for Langa). Xhosa speakers arriving in the Western Cape from the Eastern Cape thus undergo two migrations – the first being their relocation away from their home villages and towns, and the second being the daily commute from their Xhosa speaking townships to their places of work and economic transactions, where either English or Afrikaans is the dominant language.

Methodology

*Data collection*¹²

Control group

We selected a random corpus of 155 Xhosa words with their syllabic counts, along with English counterparts and their syllabic counts, to use as a control group against which to compare the samples for the study. Differences were calculated by subtracting the English syllabic count from the Xhosa in all cases. The average syllabic difference for this corpus shows that Xhosa words are on average 0.61 syllables longer than their English counterparts, with a standard deviation of 1.22.

To ensure that the syllabic counts were not skewed in favour of the hypothesis, the English words needed to be considered as they would be used when inserted into Xhosa sentences. This normally includes

- the addition of an appropriate noun-prefix for nouns
- the addition of the suffix ‘-a’ for verbs.

For adjectives, the relative concord for the noun in question would be prefixed to the English or Xhosa adjective (e.g. *ezintsha* ‘new’ or *ezi-new*), so the adjective root could be compared with the English root without prefixes, thus not affecting the syllabic ratios. Adverbs are inserted in Xhosa without concord or conjugation, so these could also be contrasted without prefixes or suffixes.

Data Set 1: selection of pictures

Although informal observations revealed the use of English borrowings for expected reasons (for conceptual gaps, numbers, dates), I wanted to find out why other words, with direct Xhosa equivalents, were given English substitutes. I chose a set of pictures representative of lexical items that might encounter borrowing due to conceptual gaps, that indicated numbers or that had direct Xhosa equivalents (to be termed ‘insertions’). In selecting the pictures, I wanted to ensure that all categories of words were represented, and thus pictorial representations of 11 nouns, 11 verbs, 4 adjectives and 4 adverbs were created. The noun pictures showed: a gun, an advertisement, a security alarm, newspapers, a remote control, weather, transport, a circle, a stadium, a wave and the figure six. Of these eleven nouns, seven have standard Xhosa equivalents (*umpu* ‘gun’, *intengisolumgaranto* ‘advertisement’, *imozulo* ‘weather’, *isithuthi* ‘transport’, *isangqa* ‘circle’, *iliza* ‘wave’, *-thandathu* ‘six’). In the remaining four, in standard Xhosa, we have one back-to-front calque – *amaphephandaba*, translating ‘papers-news’ – and three direct borrowings, two of which are in Noun Class 9 (prefix *i-*), the noun class in Xhosa that generally takes adoptives (*i-alarm*; *i-remote*) and one in Noun Class 7, because of the noun initial *-s-* of the English word ‘stadium’: *is(i)-tadium*. The reason for including only one numerical noun is that, as has already been observed,

the adoption of English numerals probably constitutes the biggest inroad into the language made in recent years, not only for mathematical purposes but also in ordinary everyday speech (Pahl et al., 1989, p. xxxii).

The four adverbs used in the research comprise two with equivalent Xhosa lexical items – *ekhohlo* ‘(to the) left’, *ekunene* ‘(to the) right’ – and two, ‘formally’ and ‘casually’, that do not have standard Xhosa equivalents but have been known to be translated as *ngokufanelekileyo* ‘appropriately’ and *ngokupholileyo* ‘coolly’.

Of the eleven verbs researched, all, apart from ‘charge’ (as in ‘charge a cellphone’), have standard Xhosa versions (*khwela* ‘ride’, *gona* ‘hug’, *thwala* ‘carry [on the head]’, *linganisa* ‘measure’, *sela* ‘drink’, *tyabeka* ‘polish’, *tyhala* ‘push’, *ahlula* ‘divide’, *dibanisa* ‘add’, *galela [ipetroli]* ‘refuel/put in [petrol]’).

Two of the four adjectives surveyed have direct Xhosa equivalents (*-onwabile* ‘happy’, *-othukile* ‘surprised/shocked’) and two (‘sexy’ and ‘stressed’) have no standard equivalents.

For ease of reference the direct English loans are written as they are spelt in English, separated by a hyphen (-) from any Xhosa prefix or suffix, e.g. *u-cute* ‘she is cute’; *hug-a* ‘hug’. Where the borrowing has changed significantly phonologically it is written as it is pronounced in Xhosa, e.g. *mejarisha* ‘measure’.

Data Set 3: South Africa's main Xhosa radio station-UMhlobo Wenene

To triangulate the findings from the elicited responses in Data Set 1, a 4232 word transcript of a broadcast from South Africa's main Xhosa language radio station, *UMhlobo Wenene*, was examined for instances of lexical borrowing from English. *UMhlobo Wenene* is explicit about its aims to use exclusively Xhosa where possible and reduce the amount of English 'creep' in the language¹³ – and this is important when considering lexical borrowing motivations.

The transcription analysed presented a total of 310 non-Xhosa insertions, of which

- 108 were English insertions for which Xhosa equivalents existed
- 70 were proper nouns
- 50 were conceptual gaps
- 22 were dates (months and years)
- were phone numbers
- 16 were commercial taglines
- 9 were times (e.g. *ngo9:00* 'at 9')
- 1 was Zulu
- 1 was a translation for listeners

Of the 108 English insertions, 21 were numbers.

Data Set 1: respondents

A hundred Xhosa speakers, equally divided between men and women (50 in Masiphumelele, 25 in Imizamo Yethu and 25 in Langa), were individually shown a set of 30 pictures of everyday objects, actions and characteristics (Data Set 1) and were asked to provide a word for each. Responses were immediately recorded in writing.

I and my Xhosa-speaking student assistants explained clearly to participants that there were no correct or incorrect answers; we merely wanted to know how they named or described things in Xhosa. We stressed that we wanted them to use the words they would use with their friends and family, and urged them to give us the first word that came to mind. All of the interviews were conducted in Xhosa.

We recorded the age, education and residential area of each participant.

Areas chosen for research

The research was conducted in the suburb of Langa (13 km from central Cape Town) and the townships of Masiphumelele (5 km from Fish Hoek, which is a suburb 22 km outside central Cape Town) and Imizamo Yethu (in Hout Bay, a suburb 90 km outside central Cape Town).

Langa¹⁴

Ninety-seven per cent of the residents of Langa (Ward 52) have Xhosa as a first language and 43% fall into the 18–34 age group. Forty-two per cent have a

Grade 8–11 education and 28% have less than Grade 8. Unlike the other two townships researched, Langa does not form part of a predominantly English-speaking municipal ward. It is a long-established suburb of Cape Town (founded in 1923), as opposed to Masiphumelele and Imizamo Yethu, which have existed only since the early 1990s.

Forty-nine per cent of the economically active Langa population is unemployed. Of the labour force, 15% are service and sales workers and 38% are involved in elementary occupations. Seventy per cent of households have an average yearly income of less than R20000 (approximately US\$2600), while 24% earn between R20000 and R80000 per annum.

Eighty per cent of migrants to Langa are from the Eastern Cape,¹⁵ where 83% of the population has Xhosa as a first language as opposed to only 23% of the Western Cape population.¹⁶

*Imizamo Yethu*¹⁷

This township forms part of Ward 74, which includes the predominately white, English-speaking suburb of Hout Bay, Camps Bay and Llandudno, although 32% of the ward's population is described as 'Black African'.¹⁸

In Imizamo Yethu itself, 83% of the population are Xhosa speaking, 38% have a Grade 8–11 education, 45% have less than a Grade 8 education and 51% are in the 18–34 age group.

Forty-six per cent of the economically active population are unemployed. Eleven per cent of the labour force are service and sales workers, and 53% are involved in elementary occupations. Seventy-two per cent of households have an average yearly income of less than R20000 (approximately US\$2600) while 25% of households earn between R20000 and R80000 per annum.

The second largest number of people arriving in this ward (20%) is from the Eastern Cape,¹⁹ and one can assume that these people would settle in the township of Imizamo Yethu.

*Masiphumelele*²⁰

Although the ward into which Masiphumelele falls (Ward 69) includes a number of predominantly white suburbs, the percentage of black Africans in that ward is nevertheless large (41%).²¹

In Masiphumelele itself, 91% of the population are Xhosa speaking, 45% have a Grade 8–11 education and 32% less than Grade 8, and 45% are in the 18–34 age group.

Fifty-eight per cent of the economically active population are unemployed, while 13% of the labour force are sales and service workers and 13% are involved in elementary occupations. Eighty-one per cent of households have an average yearly income of less than R20000 (approximately US\$2600) while 17% of households earn between R20000 and R80000 per annum.

As with Imizamo Yethu, the province yielding the second largest number of migrants to the area is the Eastern Cape (27%).²²

Results

Data Set 1: results from pictures – percentage of English borrowings

Because the focus of this article is on English borrowings, Tables 1–4 include only the English-derived responses. Zulu and township slang responses were infrequent and are therefore discussed under a separate heading.

Results from pictures – syllabic count differences

Table 5 lists the English-derived words presented by respondents with the equivalent standard Xhosa words, together with their syllable counts and the percentage of respondents preferring each word. While syllabic economy might be one explanation for the choice of an English lexical item, this theory requires extensive testing and research, and it does not hold with absolute consistency. It is also probably more likely that speakers are opting for the vocabulary of the economically dominant language in order to index their urbanity (Cook, 2009, p. 98).

Zulu, Afrikaans and township slang responses

Only words that were substituted by a statistically significant proportion of the population (30% +) are included in Table 5. A number of pictures elicited some Zulu, Afrikaans and slang responses – but these responses were all below 30%.

For ‘gun’ 13% of respondents gave the Zulu word *isibhamu*, 1% gave *intsimbi* (Xhosa for ‘iron’) and 1% gave *intshiza* (possibly a slang word derived from the Xhosa verb *-tshiza* ‘hit someone with a switch or belt’).

For ‘happy’ 1% of respondents gave the Zulu word *jabulile*.

For ‘measure’ 8% of respondents gave the word *meta*, derived from the Afrikaans *meet*.

For ‘newspapers’ 1% of respondents gave the word *amakorant*, derived from the Afrikaans *koerant*.

Table 1. Percentage of English borrowings: nouns.

English noun	English-derived term presented	% of responses
gun	<i>i-gun</i>	32
advertisement	<i>i-advertisement</i>	22
	<i>iphapha le-special</i> (paper of special)	28
	<i>iphapha leseyile</i> (paper of sale)	31
security alarm	<i>i-alarm</i>	100
newspapers	<i>ii-newspapers</i>	58
transport	<i>i-transport</i>	69
weather	<i>i-weather</i>	43
six	<i>i-six</i>	91
circle	<i>i-circle</i>	49
	<i>i-round</i>	36
	<i>i-oval</i>	2
stadium	<i>i-stadium</i>	88
	<i>i-ground</i>	89
wave	<i>i-wave</i>	1
remote control	<i>i-remote</i>	6
		100
Average percentage of English borrowings: 68.7%		

Table 2. Percentage of English borrowings: verbs.

English verb	English-derived term presented	% of responses	
hug	<i>hug-a</i>	66	
push	<i>push-a</i>	72	
carry	–	0	
measure	<i>mejarisha</i>	83	86
	<i>teyipisha</i>	3	
drink	<i>drink-a</i>		1
polish	<i>polish-a</i>	83	99
	<i>shayinisha</i>	12	
	<i>varnish-a</i>	1	
	<i>clean-a</i>	3	
divide	<i>divide-a</i>		71
refuel	<i>fill-a</i>		1
add	<i>edisha</i>	9	39
	<i>plus-a</i>	30	
ride	–		0
recharge	<i>tshaja</i>		100
Average percentage of English borrowings: 48.6%			

For ‘ride a bike’ 1% of respondents gave the Zulu *gibela* and 1% used *reya*, from the Afrikaans ‘ry’.

For ‘polish’ 1% of respondents gave the word *frayifa*, derived from the Afrikaans *vryf*.

Statistically, only the words *isibhamu* and *meta* are significant. With regard to syllabic economy, the Zulu word *isibhamu* contains one more syllable than the Xhosa word *umpu*, so this does not suggest syllabic economy, whereas *meta* contains two syllables less than the Xhosa *linganisa*, and in this instance syllabic economy could be instrumental in the choice of the borrowing.

Results from pictures – statistical analysis

The words offered (whether Xhosa or English) were recorded along with their frequency, and those English words that occurred frequently enough to warrant

Table 3. Percentage of English borrowings: adjectives.

English adjective	English-derived term presented	% of responses	
happy	<i>u-happy</i>	9	12
	<i>u-right</i>	2	
	<i>u-excited</i>	1	
stressed	<i>une-stress</i>	79	84
	<i>u-busy</i>	1	
	<i>une-nerves</i>	3	
	<i>u-confused</i>	1	
sexy	<i>u-sexy</i>	23	43
	<i>u-cute</i>	11	
	<i>uyi-model</i>	8	
	<i>u-nice</i>	1	
surprised	<i>une-surprise</i>		87
Average percentage of English borrowings: 56.5%			

Table 4. Percentage of English borrowings: adverbs.

English adverb	English-derived term presented	% of responses
left	<i>left</i>	87
right	<i>right</i>	88
casually	<i>casual</i>	83
	<i>summer</i>	84
formally	<i>formal</i>	1
	<i>winter</i>	89
	<i>smart</i>	91
Average percentage English borrowings: 87.5%		1

attention (>30%) and that did not correspond to conceptual gaps in Xhosa were compared with the answers given in Xhosa for the same picture.

The mean syllabic difference between these English words and their Xhosa equivalents was 0.87, with a standard deviation of 1.19 syllables. The differences in this sample set were run against the control group using a one-way ANOVA, as in Shin (2010), using the syllable length difference as the dependant variable. The data showed that the length difference between Xhosa and English for the sample words **was greater** than the average length difference presented in the control corpus, but **not significantly so** [$F(1,168) = 1.9284$].

Data Set 2: results from UMhlobo Wenene – percentage of English borrowings

Of the English insertions (excluding numbers) for which Xhosa equivalents exist, 75.4% were nouns, 14.5% were expressions or phrases, 3.6% were verbs, 2.7% were adjectives, 2.7% were conjunctions and 0.9% were prepositions (Table 6).

Results from UMhlobo Wenene-statistical analysis

Each insertion used in the *UMhlobo Wenene* radio programme was paired up with its Xhosa equivalent, and once again syllabic length differences were tallied. The mean difference for this corpus was 2.39 syllables with a standard deviation of 2.69 syllables. Once again a one-way ANOVA was run between this corpus and the control group, with the result that the length differences for the sample group **were significant** [$F(1,261) = 54.1604$, $p < 0.01$].

However, given that almost 20% of this sample consisted of comparing Xhosa versus English words for numbers (which are notoriously lengthy in Xhosa), separate analyses were run for the number insertions *only* ($n = 21$) and then for the remainder of the sample *without the number insertions* ($n = 87$). The results are tabulated in Table 7.

Limitations of the statistics used

The one-way ANOVA system has been used in this case for a simplistic numerical comparison between average length-differences of syllables between the various corpora. It should be noted, however, that this was chosen as a similar method to

Table 5. Comparison of syllabic counts.

English-derived term presented	% of respondents using English	Xhosa term presented	% of respondents using Xhosa	Syllables in English term	Syllables in Xhosa term
<i>i-gun</i>	32	<i>umpu</i>	51	2	2
<i>ii-newspapers</i>	58	<i>amaphephandaba</i>	28	5	6
<i>i-transport</i>	69	<i>izithuthi</i>	31	3	4
<i>i-weather</i>	43	<i>imozulu</i>	57	3	4
<i>i-six</i>	91	<i>-thandathu</i>	8	2	5
<i>i-circle</i>	49	<i>isangqa</i>	10	3	3
<i>i-round</i>	36	<i>iqanda</i>	3	2	3
<i>i-oval</i>	2			3	3
<i>hug-a</i>	66	<i>gonana</i>	8	2	3
		<i>wongana</i>	11		3
		<i>sondelelana</i>	1		5
		<i>manga</i>	1		3
		<i>bambana</i>	13		3
<i>push-a</i>	72	<i>tshova</i>	18	2	2
		<i>tyhiliza</i>	1		3
		<i>dudula</i>	1		3
		<i>tyhala</i>	8		3
<i>mejarisha</i>	83	<i>linganisa</i>	5	4	4
<i>teyipisha</i>	3	<i>kala</i>	1	4	2
		<i>menta</i>	8		2
<i>divide-a</i>	71	<i>ahlula</i>	15	3	3
<i>-ne-stress</i>	79	<i>(uno)xinizelelo</i>	3	2	5
<i>-busy</i>	1	<i>(u)khathazekile</i>	2	2	5
<i>-confused</i>	1	<i>(u)dinive</i>	4	2	3
<i>-ne-nerve</i>	3	<i>(u)xakekile</i>	1	2	4
		<i>(ak)onwabanga</i>	1		4
<i>-ne-surprise</i>	87	<i>(u)thukile</i>	11	3	3
		<i>(uya)khuza</i>	1		2
		<i>(u)mangalisiwe</i>	1		5
<i>left</i>	87	<i>ekhohlo</i>	10	1	3
		<i>inxele</i>	2		3
<i>right</i>	88	<i>ekunene</i>	11	1	4
<i>casual</i>	84	<i>ngokupholileyo</i>	16	2	6
<i>summer</i>	1			2	
<i>formal</i>	91	<i>ngokufanelekileyo</i>	0	2	8
<i>winter</i>	1	<i>kakuhle</i>	7	2	3
<i>smart</i>	1	<i>shushu</i>	2	1	2

compare with Shin (2010). The use of ANOVA for discrete data (i.e. syllable counts) is not statistically completely appropriate: the comparison of the mean and standard deviation measures provided is on statistically more solid ground.

Comparison of results from Data Set 1 (picture responses) and Data Set 2 (UMhlobo Wenene)

Data Set 1 reveals a far larger number of English insertions for every grammatical category except nouns (68.7% in Data Set 1 as against 75.4% in Data Set 2). The fact that Data Set 2 has almost no English insertions for adjectives and adverbs could be

Table 6. Examples of insertions in *UMhlobo Wenene*.

Phrases & expressions	Nouns	Verbs	Adjectives	Conjunctions
<i>you know</i>	<i>understanding</i>	<i>understand</i>	<i>belated</i>	<i>because of</i>
<i>exactly</i>	<i>way</i>	<i>observe</i>	<i>final</i>	<i>but</i>
<i>ok</i>	<i>job</i>	<i>win</i>	<i>open</i>	<i>when</i>
<i>that means</i>	<i>number</i>	<i>mention</i>	<i>local</i>	
<i>at least</i>	<i>community</i>	<i>flow</i>	<i>brand new</i>	
<i>every day</i>	<i>challenges</i>	<i>celebrate</i>	<i>active</i>	
<i>i live my life</i>	<i>openness</i>	<i>test</i>		
<i>hullo</i>	<i>treatment</i>	<i>stick</i>		
<i>stick to the script</i>	<i>pork</i>	<i>respond</i>		
<i>happy birthday</i>	<i>mixture</i>	<i>support</i>		
<i>sure</i>	<i>subject</i>	<i>accommodate</i>		
	<i>happiness</i>	<i>deposit</i>		

due to the fact that these grammatical categories have been inserted as phrases or expressions in Data Set 2 (*brand new*, *happy birthday*). The higher proportion of English insertions for verbs in Data Set 1 could be due to a number of factors: the verbs in Data Set 1 are used more in certain domains (e.g. school, work) in which English predominates; the Data Set 1 respondents were less aware of ‘correct’ Xhosa than the *UMhlobo Wenene* broadcasters of Data Set 2); or the English verbs are syllabically shorter than their Xhosa counterparts.

Possible reasons for borrowings

Syllabic economy

In a study of lexical borrowing in New York Spanish, Shin (2010) argues that the *length* of the word determines which words from the donor language will substitute the same lexical items in the recipient language. She observes that ‘a drive for efficiency has been shown to influence the structure and use of language in general’ (Shin, 2010, p. 47) and cites examples of the ‘clipping’ of long words in English, for example ‘gas’ for ‘gasoline’. ‘Clipping’ also occurs in Xhosa: examples are ‘*Uneminyaka emingaphi?* ‘How old are you?’ → *Unangaphi?*; *nokuba* ‘whether’ → *noba*; *siza kuhamba* ‘we will go’ → *sohamba*. Citing psycholinguistic research indicating that short words are recalled more easily than long words, Shin concludes that it ‘is reasonable to attribute word-shortening to a general tendency to progress towards a more efficient system’ (Shin, 2010, p. 47).

Table 7. Standard deviation in syllabic length – English insertions vs Xhosa words.

Sample	Mean	Standard deviation	ANOVA results	Significant?
All insertions ($n = 108$)	2.388889	2.692438	$F(1,261) = 54.1604$	Yes ($p < 0.01$)
Numbers only ($n = 21$)	5.238	3.080662	$F(1,174) = 390.3$	Yes ($p < 0.01$)
Sample without numbers ($n = 87$)	1.7011494	2.0860274	$F(1,240) = 28.750101$	Yes ($p < 0.01$)

Ramsay-Brijball (1999) notes that many of the respondents in her study at the University of Durban-Westville explained that they used English in order to be 'brief and concise', claiming that the language allowed them to express themselves more 'succinctly'. While Ramsay-Brijball contests this reason, with examples comparing short agglutinating Zulu sentences with their longer English translations (in which the morphemes are isolated), it is nevertheless significant that in the present study there appears to be a move towards Shin's notion of 'efficiency in lexical borrowing' (Shin, 2010) and what I would term 'syllabic economy'. Statistical analysis of the two data groups in this paper would tend to confirm my hypothesis, but further analysis of a greater corpus of spoken Xhosa is needed.

Language dominance

The fact that English (as opposed to township slang, Zulu or Afrikaans) was the language used in the majority of non-Xhosa responses indicates that this language is dominant in the lives of the respondents. They work, shop and travel in areas in which English is spoken. English is the language of major marketing campaigns, both commercial and public, and is the language respondents use with neighbours and colleagues from other parts of Africa. English is also a prestige language: a mastery of English is seen as connected to economic upliftment and one's identity as urban.

Stylistic considerations

While not the preoccupation of this paper, it is still important to note the influence of affective reasons for borrowing and the notion of 'luxury loans' versus 'necessary' loans (Onysko & Winter-Froemel, 2011). In the *UMhlobo Wenene* transcript the use of English for stylistic reasons is evident (14.5% of insertions were expressions or phrases), but this area requires further focused research and investigation.

Lexical/conceptual gaps

While it is understandable that 'remote control' and '(security) alarm' have to be loanwords since there are no equivalents in Xhosa, one would imagine that concepts such as 'stressed' and 'sexy' would be readily expressible in the mother tongue. Data in this study show that speakers prefer to use English words for these concepts. My theory is that whereas *-khathazekile* is correctly translated into English as 'worried', it does not include the concomitant frenzy that comes with urban living and therefore speakers opt for the short, unambiguous 'stress'.

As far as 'sexy' goes, even the word 'sex' in Xhosa is referred to indirectly as *isondo* 'the corner of the sleeping blanket', so 'to have sex' is *ukwabelana ngesondo* 'to share the corner of the sleeping blanket together'. How does one make an adjective out of this? One could translate the concept of 'sexy' as *unomtsalane kubantu besinye isini*, which means 'to have attraction to people of the other sex', but in practice this is so unwieldy that one resorts to English, where the word is short, sweet and frequently used.

It should be of interest to educationalists in particular that terms such as 'left', 'right', 'measure' and 'circle' were largely expressed via the English lexicon. If English has gained ascendancy in these domains, then interventions that seek to redress

linguistic imbalances need to take into account this aspect of language change. It is important to note that, whereas urban mixed codes such as 'isiTsotsi' might 're-contextualise English words' (Rudwick, 2005, p. 313), I would argue that the phenomenon I am considering in this paper is not isiTsotsi because the English words are not recontextualised, but employed in place of the Xhosa lexical items, maintaining their original English meaning (for example, *iwetha* for *imozulu* – 'weather').

Other variables

Gender

On average, women gave an English response 62% of the time and men did so 59% of the time.

Gender is the only independent variable that is statistically significant at the .10 level. This means that we are 90% sure that the effects of gender are not random occurrences. Being female has a positive relationship to English use: thus, taking into account a person's age, township, and education, just being female makes them more likely to use English.

Education, area and age

Education, area, and age did not have statistically significant effects on the percentage of English used.

Conclusion

This research suggests that Xhosa speakers in Cape Town substitute English words for Xhosa ones not only to fill lexical gaps, but also to express emotions, states and attributes that have a particularly urban context and for which English lexical items seem most appropriate and economical. It also suggests that unlike Gauteng townships, where many different African languages coexist and therefore greater cross-borrowing occurs (Finlayson & Slabbert, 1997; Kieswetter, 1995), Western Cape townships, with the constant influx of migrants from the Eastern Cape, accommodate pockets of relatively stable Xhosa-speaking environments, although within a broader linguistic setting in which English dominates.

The sample was small, so further research needs to be conducted to confirm the validity of the following suggested trends:

- Nouns that describe the environment (e.g. 'wave') are less likely to be borrowed.
- Verbs that describe everyday actions (e.g. 'carry', 'put in', 'ride') are less likely to be borrowed.
- Verbs that have some emotional content (e.g. 'hug') are more likely to be borrowed.
- Verbs that describe actions conducted in work situations (e.g. 'polish', 'measure', 'push') are more likely to occur in English.
- Adverbs that describe urban fashions, scenes, states or directions (e.g. 'casually', '[to the] left') are more likely to be borrowed.

- Xhosa's main adjectives, apart from the numerals (e.g. 'big', 'small', 'tall', 'short', 'old', 'young', 'beautiful', 'ugly'), are likely to remain unborrowed, but others, known as relatives in Xhosa grammar,²³ such as 'weak', 'strong', 'surprised', 'stressed', 'sweet', 'perfect' and 'serious' – which are more difficult to translate directly into Xhosa and are derived from other parts of speech – are likely to be subjected to English influence.

Finally, the fact that 99% of the borrowed words produced by respondents do not occur in the definitive Xhosa dictionary is significant both for linguistic enquiry and for practical issues with regard to language translation, and the relationship between the 'translatability' of concepts and mother-tongue instruction.

Notes

1. The Minister of Higher Education, Blade Nzimande, said in September 2009 that 'those taking up African languages at university level were sometimes perceived by their peers as "second-grade students"' (Sapa, 2009).
2. The most watched news bulletin on South African television is a Zulu daily newscast, attracting an audience of 3.2 million, followed by a Xhosa bulletin with 2.7 million watchers (Naidu, 2010).
3. <http://www.capetown.gov.za/en/stats/2001census/Documents/Langa.htm#DemographicProfile>
4. An example of this fixation on standard Xhosa was the debate in 2009 on the official Xhosa name for Cape Town's new stadium.

Councillors were unanimous yesterday in their support of Cape Town Stadium as the name for the new facility being built for the World Cup, but there was some confusion about its Xhosa equivalent.

Ikapa Stadium was first suggested, but then it was said that eStadium saseKapa would be more accurate.

City director of legal services Lungelo Mbandazayo ended the debate by calling for the stadium to be Inkundla yezemidlalo Yasekapa (Lewis, 2009).

In the present study, not one respondent offered *inkundla yezemidlalo* when shown a picture of a stadium. When the word *inkundla* was put to them informally, all respondents said the word meant 'law court'.

5. In a recent study on health support, a Xhosa-speaking respondent (in a recorded interview transcribed by the author of this article) struggled to understand the standard Xhosa word for 'support', *inkxaso*, used by the interviewer, and asked, '*Yintoni inkxaso?*' (What is *inkxaso*?) The interviewer replied, '*Inkxaso yi-support.*' (*Inkxaso* is 'support'.) For the remainder of the Xhosa conversation, both interviewer and interviewee used the English word 'support'.
6. Simon Donnelly observed in a letter to the *Mail & Guardian* newspaper that with regard to language, the official government census could not be deemed reliable.

South Africa appears to be neatly chopped up into 11 zones of monolingual speakers. The truth is radically removed from this. First, there are documentable, important subvarieties of several national languages: there are children (importantly, for the purposes of language transmission) speaking Mpondo, Bhaca, Cele and smaller Nguni languages, who are forced to declare themselves arbitrarily as 'Xhosa' or 'Zulu', even where these 'dialects' are mutually unintelligible with the standard language.

Second, there are millions of households that are multilingual in English and Afrikaans, or in some combination of Zulu/Xhosa/Sotho/Tsonga/everything else,

for whom it is a non-trivial matter to decide whether they feel they speak more Zulu or more Tsonga, more English or more Afrikaans, at home.

When asked by a form-wielding official, guess what? People usually answer with the name of a prestige language, such as Zulu or English (as cited in Hacksley, Jeffery, Mesthrie, Reddy, & Wildsmith-Cromarty, n.d.).

7. In 2009 I conducted an analysis of the Xhosa used in the Department of Education Annual National Assessment for Grades 1 to 7 (Craig, 2009, p. 31). I observed:

In the Grade 1 NUMERACY section, Question 6: Writing the numeral 12 in words. This proved very difficult for learners. This is probably because most Xhosa speaking people count in English words. Of a random selection of 10 answer books only two learners could transcribe the numeral correctly in Xhosa:

- 1 learner wrote *lishumi anesibini*
- 1 learner wrote *lishum elwesibini*
- 1 learner wrote *iyishumuiyi*
- 1 learner wrote *lishumi elinebini*
- 1 learner wrote *60*
- 1 learner wrote *shumile sibini*
- 1 learner wrote *lismztkanawi*
- 1 learner wrote *litsumi lesibini*
- ✓ 2 learners wrote *lishumi elinesibini* [the correct term in standard Xhosa]

8. A good example of this would be an exchange recounted to me by a person teaching Afrikaans to Xhosa speakers, who overheard a learner asking his friend in class: '*Lithini igama elithi "snaaks" nge-Afrikaans?*' (What is the word for *snaaks* in Afrikaans?) Clearly the Xhosa speaker had so internalised the lexical item *snaaks* that he did not realise it was, in fact, a 'borrowed' Afrikaans term (meaning 'funny' or 'strange') and saw it as a 'normal' Xhosa word.
9. Ninety-four per cent of Masiphumelele residents earn less than R1 700 per month (about US\$219). <http://www.capetown.gov.za/en/stats/2001census/Documents/Masiphumelele.htm>
10. Cape Town has an annual influx of 48,000 people, many of them from the Eastern Cape. Source: <http://www.waterdialogues.org/south-africa/documents/p.46CapeTownCaseStudySummary.pdf>.
11. The population of Masiphumelele nearly doubled in the five years from 1996 to 2001 and has more than tripled since then. <http://www.capetown.gov.za/en/stats/2001census/Documents/Masiphumelele.htm>
12. Many thanks to Sara Muller, BSc, for statistical calculations using ANOVA.
13. One of *UMhlobo Wenene's* taglines is *isiXhosa asitolikwa* 'Xhosa is not translated'.
14. <http://www.capetown.gov.za/en/stats/2001census/Documents/Langa.htm>
15. <http://www.capetown.gov.za/en/stats/2001census/Documents/2006%20Ward05#Migration>
16. <http://southafrica.info/about/people/popprov.htm>
17. <http://www.capetown.gov.za/en/stats/2001census/Documents/Imizamo%20Yethu.htm>
18. <http://www.capetown.gov.za/en/ehd/Documents/Ward74.doc>
19. <http://www.capetown.gov.za/en/stats/2001census/Documents/2006%20Ward074.htm#Migration>
20. <http://www.capetown.gov.za/en/stats/2001census/Documents/Masiphumelele.htm>
21. <http://www.capetown.gov.za/en/ehd/Documents/Ward69.doc>
22. <http://www.capetown.gov.za/en/stats/2001census/Documents/2006%20Ward069.htm#Migration>
23. In Xhosa, words functioning similarly to adjectives in English are divided into two groups: adjectives and relatives. The adjectives are a fixed set, comprising the numbers 1–6; the Xhosa equivalents of 'big', 'small', 'tall', 'short', 'lovely', 'ugly', 'old', 'new' and 'many'; and the question 'how many?'. Any other word that describes a noun is called a relative and uses different prefixes from the adjectives. There are underived relative stems such as 'easy', 'difficult' and all the colours, but many are derived from other parts of speech.

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