

# Syntactic Interference Exhibited By Secondary School Learners Of Kiswahili: A Study Of Sabaot First Language Speakers In Bungoma County, Kenya

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**Abstract:** *The purpose of this study was to investigate the syntactic effect Kisabaot, as L1 has on the learning of Kiswahili, as L2 language among Sabaot speaking students in Mt. Elgon Sub- county, in Bungoma county secondary schools. The study population comprised of form four students. The purposive sampling technique was used to select 10 schools that took part in the research and simple random sampling was used to select 30% of the students per class in each of the 10 selected schools. The study adopted descriptive research design. Data was collected by use of essay writing and interview schedule. Descriptive data analysis was used to analyze the research findings. Analysis was guided by research questions. The study revealed that Sabaot syntax was exhibited in the learners written Kiswahili essays as a result of transfer of syntactic structures from Sabaot to Kiswahili. Learners transferred the Sabaot sentence structure to Kiswahili. The study proposes that teachers of Kiswahili be sensitized on the different L1 structure of Sabaot speaking learners and make the students aware of the differences. The study also recommends the use of communicative approach as an instructional method among these learners, by intensive writing exercises in Kiswahili as an alternative to diminish L1 interference.*

**Keywords:** *syntactic interference, sentence structure, corncordial agreement.*

## I. BACKGROUND

Several scholars have conducted research on the effect of L1, on L2 and emerged with varied findings. Muhindi (1981) and Ochwaya (1992) researched on phonology and discovered that there was evidence of students transferring the phonological features of L1 to L2 in English language. Nickel (1973) points out that L1 is a source that the learner relies on less and less as his competence in the L2 increases. This suggests that L2 learner must heavily rely on his/her L1 hence causing interference.

By 19<sup>th</sup> C it was evident too that Kiswahili language had had interactions with other languages in the world (Mukuthuria, 2008). Wilkins (1972) as quoted by Mukuthuria

(2008), says that such errors as pronunciation, spelling, grammatical, lexical have a tendency to occur to L2 learners. That is to say, as L2 learner makes attempts to speak a foreign language he/she gets L1 interference. Mukuthuria (2004) studied Tigania interference on the learning of Kiswahili on the aspect of mophology. Scholar admits that there was L1, L2 interference between Kiswahili and Tigania on the aspects of phonology, lexical and, syntactical and even semantically. This study investigated the syntactic effect Kisabaot, as L1 has on the learning of Kiswahili, as L2 language as exhibited on Kiswahili written compositions.

Wanyoike (1978) as quoted by Oduor (2012), in his study, recommended for studies to be done to ascertain challenges facing leaners from different communities as they

learn Kiswahili as their L1. This study was based on that premise; to investigate the syntactic effect Kisabaot, as L1, has on the learning of Kiswahili, as L2, among Sabaot speaking students in Mt. Elgon Sub- county secondary schools in Kenya.

Sabaot as a language originates from the larger group of Nilo-Sahara, one of the largest group of speakers in Africa. Under Nilo-Sahara, we get the Nilotic speakers who comprise the Kalenjins.

Kalenjins Comprise of Sabaot, Pokot, Terik, Sengwer, Marakwet, Keiyo, Tugen, Kipsigis, and Nandi. Sabaot speakers have an approximate population of over 270,000 who live in Bungoma in Western part of Kenya. Lewis (2009).

One of the features of any language is its structure. Every language has it's own structure. Sabaot language adopts the structure of verb, subject, object ( VSO). On the other hand Kiswahili takes SVO structure. The table below clearly shows.

English	Kiswahili	Sabaot
Father tilled the farm S V O	Baba alilima shamba S V O	Kiibat baaba mbareet V S O
The child is crying S V	Mtoto analia S V	Riire leekwet V S
Mother beat the child S V O	Mama alimpiga mtoto S V O	Koopir moomo Leekweet V S O

According to Corder ( 1981), the difference in sentence structure made L2 learners to make syntactical errors whereby they transferred the structure of L1 into L2. In this case Sabaot structure is transferred into Kiswahili structure, having not learnt the patterns of the target language.

In conclusion, these syntactical differences between Kiswahili and Kisabaot contribute to learners making errors while forming sentences in Kiswahili. So far the researcher has not come across studies investigating Sabaot interference on the learning of Kiswahili. This makes this study significant.

## II. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to investigate the syntactic effect Kisabaot, as L1, has on the learning of Kiswahili, as L2, among Sabaot speaking students in Mt. Elgon Sub- county secondary schools. The specific objective was to establish the syntactic system of Sabaot language, identify and analyse the Sabaot syntax system on Kiswahili written compositions of form four students whose first language is Sabaot and to investigate the Sabaot syntactic effect on Kiswahili written compositions among students whose first language is Sabaot.

## III. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted descriptive research design. This study investigated the syntactic effect Kisabaot, as L1 has on the learning of Kiswahili, as L2. In order to get the sample size, this study obtained 10 schools out of the overall 26 schools in the area of study using purposive sampling. From these 10 schools the target population of 200 Sabaot speaking students

was obtained using purposive sampling. Out of the 200 students, the study selected 20% of them by random sampling. The study also targetted 10 teachers from the same 10 schools.

The research used essay writing to collect data from students while interview schedule was used to collect data from Kiswahili teachers.

## IV. RESULTS

The study revealed that Sabaot syntax was exhibited in the learners written Kiswahili essays as a result of transfer of syntactic structures from Sabaot to Kiswahili. Learners transferred the Sabaot sentence structure to Kiswahili.

It was evident that Sabaot learners made errors in Kiswahili written compositions because Sabaot sentence structure of VSO was different from Kiswahili sentence structure which is SVO.

This is supported by Oduor (2012) who quotes Kulka na Levenston (1983) saying that, the transfer of L1 features is the cause of errors on the learning of L2. Ellis (1997) argues that L2 learners transfer the knowledge they have on L1 to L2.

## V. WRITTEN COMPOSITIONS

The written compositions were marked while underlining and recording syntactical interferences. A total of 190 compositions were marked and results presented below.

## VI. SENTENCE STRUCTURE INTERFERENCE

The Sabaot VSO structure was exhibited in learners Kiswahili language which is SVO. See table 1 below.

Erroneous sentence	Correct version
<i>Hawana nidhamu hawa watoto</i>	Watoto hawa hawana nidhamu
<i>Sikuwa na nidhamu mimi shuleni</i>	Mimi sikuwa na nidhamu shuleni
<i>Mtaanguka nyinyi mtihani</i>	Ninyi mtaanguka mtihani

Table 1

The above syntactical interferences accounted for 51 learners which is 20%.

## VII. CONCORDANCE AGREEMENT

50% of the errors were attributed to lack of concordial agreement in Kiswahili sentences. All Kiswahili nouns are categorized in twelve classes which determine concordial agreement in a sentence, Mohamed (2001). As far as the researcher is concerned, Sabaot has no noun classes hence no concordial agreement of whatever manner. This feature affects the syntactic structure of Kiswahili sentences made by a Sabaot student. Such sentences do not have concordial agreement. This difference emerged as the cause of syntactical errors made by the learners. The results were presented in the table 2, below.

Erroneous sentence in Kiswahili	Correct version	Kiswahili Noun clause
✓ <i>Makosa za hapa na pale</i>	Makosa ya hapa na pale	YA-YA
✓ <i>Kwa upande nyingine</i>	Kwa upande mwingine	U-U
✓ <i>Wakati nzuri</i>	Wakati mzuri	U-U
✓ <i>Matumizi huu ya mihadarati</i>	Matumizi haya ya mihadarati	YA-YA
✓ <i>Wanafunzi alikuwa na kiburi ambalo alitakikani</i>	Wanafunzi walikuwa na kiburi ambayo haitakikani	A-WA

Table 2

From the errors made by the respondents, it was evident that the respondents simply transferred the Sabaot way of classification into Kiswahili causing syntactical errors. Many nouns in Kiswahili were given the wrong concordance agreements because of this kind of transfer.

#### VIII. INTERVIEW FROM TEACHERS

The interview questions were meant to establish the teachers' experiences of their learners while learning and using Kiswahili.

All the 10 (100%) teachers reported that most learners experienced challenges in written Kiswahili compositions. Most learners did not observe the subject verb agreement, which is a syntactical rule in Kiswahili. They transferred their L1 sentence structure to Kiswahili. Teachers attributed this to the learners environment which is predominantly Sabaot. Teachers also used their L1 when addressing their learners and when giving examples especially when learners do not seem to understand the teacher.

A teacher who was not a native from the area of study (who represented 1%), and having taught in the area for 15 years, attributed the serious L1, L2 interferences to tribal clashes of 1992 which ejected the non natives. Thereafter the area became predominantly Sabaot hence the interferences.

80% of the teachers attributed L1, L2 interferences to poor reading culture in languages especially in Kiswahili. Through reading learners would experience more L2 structures as they gradually reduce L1 structures. 70% of teachers attributed not giving learners written compositions frequently. They only assigned them during end of term exams.

#### IX. CONCLUSION

From this study we can conclude that the Sabaot syntax was exhibited in the learners written Kiswahili essays as a result of transfer of syntactic structures from Sabaot to Kiswahili. Learners transferred the Sabaot sentence structure to Kiswahili. It was found that indeed there is difference

between the Sabaot and Kiswahili sentence structure. Sabaot sentence structure of VSO was different from Kiswahili sentence structure which is SVO.

Apart from that, Kiswahili is based on noun classes which determine concordial agreement. As the researcher is concerned, Sabaot has no noun classes hence no concordial agreement of whatever manner. This feature affects the syntactic structure of Kiswahili sentences made by a Sabaot student. Such sentences do not have concordial agreement. This difference emerged as the cause of syntactical errors made by the learners.

Learners need to be encouraged to read many Kiswahili literature intensively and extensively in order to build Kiswahili structures in their memory. We also recommend that learners practice writing Kiswahili compositions at an early stage, and then gradually progress to higher levels.

The study proposes that teachers of Kiswahili be sensitized on the different L1 structure of Sabaot speaking learners and make the students aware of the differences.

The study also recommends the use of communicative approach as an instructional method among these learners, by intensive writing exercises in Kiswahili as an alternative to diminish L1 interference.

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