

# Language History in Central Kenya from a Dialectological Perspective: The Extra-Linguistic Background

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## The Structure of the Thesis:

- Scientific Context: Genetic Inheritance vs. Areal Diffusion
- **Central Kenya: Languages and Dialects, Social Structure, History**
- Quantitative Analysis (Dialectometry)
- Qualitative Analysis
- **Conclusion**

## The Structure of this Presentation:

1. The Object of Research: Central Kenyan Bantu
2. The Extra-Linguistic Background
  - 2.1 Ethnography
  - 2.2 History / Oral Tradition
  - 2.3 School Policy
3. A Historical Scenario: Extra-Linguistic Factors / Parameters
4. The Linguistic Evidence: The Method of Dialectometry
5. Combining Linguistic with Extra-Linguistic Evidence

## 1. The Object of Research: Central Kenyan Bantu (CKB)



Language	Number of Speakers
Gikuyu	7 Mio.
Kamba	4 Mio.
Meru	2 Mio.
Embu/Mbeere	500.000
Tharaka	140.000
Chuka	70.000

Map 1: The Central Kenyan Bantu Languages located in the Kenyan Highlands

## 2. The Extra-Linguistic Background

Extra-Linguistic Background = **socio-historical circumstances** of a speech community

Assumption: The social, cultural, historical, and political circumstances that speakers live under are reflected in their language.

In order to get an insight into the extra-linguistic factors that have an impact on language (shown in lexical borrowing or phonological homogenization), we need to turn to the 'neighboring' disciplines of linguistics / dialectology:

- Social Anthropology (Ethnography)
- History
- Political Science

### 2.1 Social Anthropology

Ethnography = the description of specific human cultures

<b>Economy</b>	<i>mixed economy</i>	pastoralism <u>and</u> agriculture, hunting, trading, handcraft...
<b>Social Structure</b>	<i>clan-system</i>	e.g. the Gikuyu-system (Muriuki 1974): <i>muhiriga</i> > _____ <u>clan</u> <i>mbari</i> > _____ <u>sub-clan</u> <i>rugongo</i> > _____ <u>ridge</u> <i>itura</i> > _____ <u>several homesteads</u> <i>micii</i> > _____ <u>homestead</u> <i>nyumba</i> > _____ <u>house</u> 'ego'
<b>Political Order</b>	<i>acephalous, age-sets</i>	e.g. the Embu-System (Mwaniki 1973): <i>nthuke</i> > _____ <u>highest legislative body</u> <i>njama</i> > _____ <u>local military/judicial council</u> <i>athamaki</i> > _____ <u>counsellors on the ridge level</u> <i>head of a household</i>  <i>Age-set:</i> a group of individuals initiated at the same time <i>Age-class:</i> different stages in a person's life (e.g. uncircumcised boy > warrior > counsellor > elder)

Table 1: Overview of some ethnographic facts from Central Kenya

Other ethnographic facts to be considered include **religion / beliefs, law, material culture** etc.

**Note:** All of the above factors are under constant change! The economy, for example, is shifting towards the provision of services (e.g. transportation, tourism) or industrial art ('jua kali').

➔ The ethnographic data reveal: Central Kenya constitutes a **cultural area**, i.e. a geographically relatively homogeneous region whose inhabitants adapt to the environmental (and social) conditions in similar ways (= **cultural convergence?**).

## 2.2 History

Oral Tradition = cultural material transmitted verbally from generation to generation in songs, folktales, proverbs, chants etc.

- **Oral Tradition: Total Dismissal vs. the "Historian's Myth" (Spear 1974)**

*A Historian's Myth - the Case of Meru:*

A long time ago, the ancestors of the Meru lived in captivity near a large body of water which they had to cross on their way to freedom.

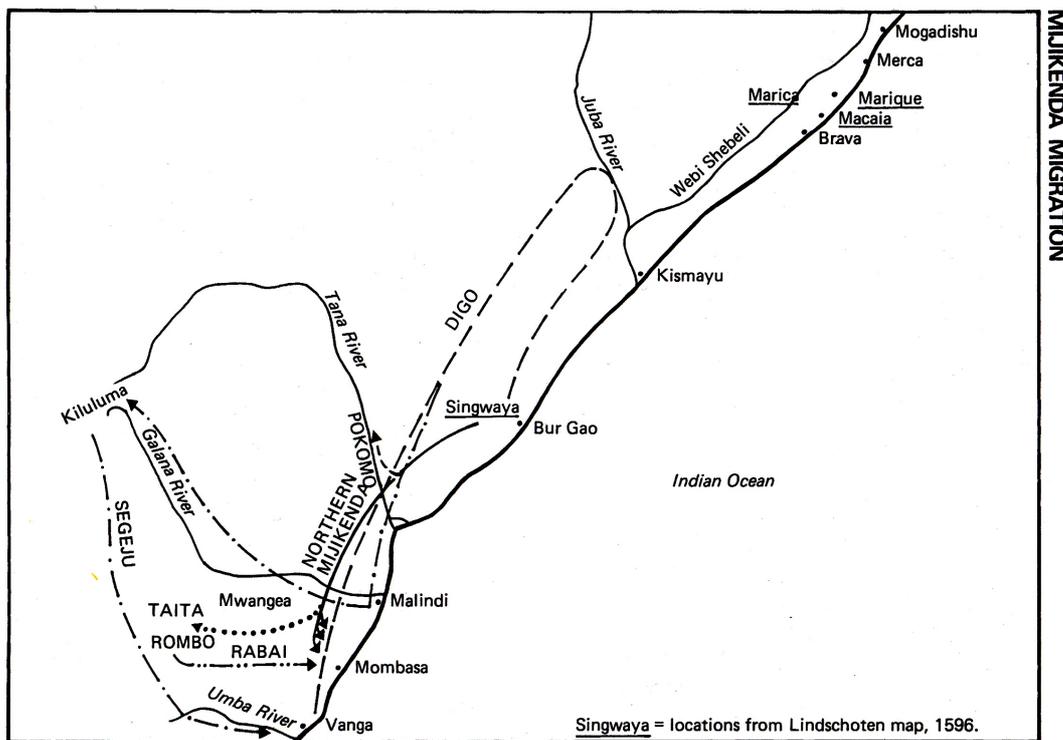
Muthururi (a Meru prophet) "struck the water with his mystic rod, and it parted. Some flowed to one side and the rest to other side, forming a wide path in the middle along which the people went across."

Nyaga 1997: 4

"And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided."

Exodus 14:21

*Another Historian's Myth - the Shungwaya Theme:*



Map 2: The migration of the Mijikenda from Shungwaya (Spear 1974: 83)

Lambert (1949) suggests Shungwaya origins for the Gikuyu, Embu, Mbeere, Tharaka, Chuka, Meru, and Kamba.

This is contested *inter alia* by Munro (1967) and Muriuki (1974).

*A Myth of Origin (Gikuyu):*

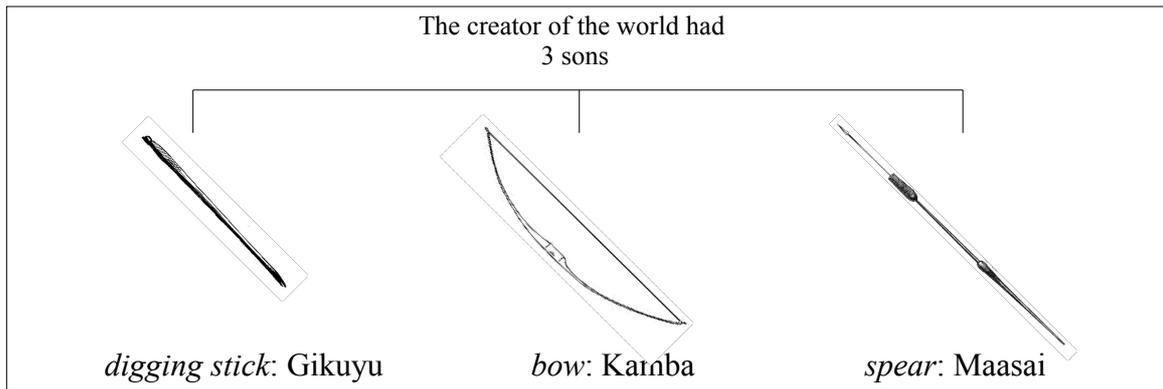


Figure 1: A Gikuyu myth of origin (Middleton/Kershaw 1965: 14 f.)

➔ Oral Traditions / Myths of Origin are more than mere historical accounts, they have **social** and **political functions!**

- **Political Pressure on Oral Traditions**

- denial of migration
- denial of murder / expulsion

- **Dating Historical Events in Central Kenya**

Age-Sets = groups of individuals initiated at the same time (≅ generation); age-sets / generations are named after memorable historical events (droughts, famines, wars etc.)

England	Gikuyuland
"Victorian Era": 1837-1901 AD	"Iregi": 1827-1861 (± 10 years) "Maina": 1862-1897 (± 5 years)

Table 2: The ruling generations of Nyeri (Gikuyu) during the Victorian Age (Muriuki 1974: 21)

➔ When dealt with appropriately, Oral Traditions provide reliable information on at least 400 years of Central Kenyan history. In order to relate Oral Traditions with **linguistic evidence**, one needs to look for useful / comparable information, i.e. **extra-linguistic parameters** (see below: 3. Historical Scenarios).

### 2.3 School Policy

**Q:** How does vernacular teaching effect the linguistic / dialectal situation in Central Kenya?

The Historical Background: Western education in Kenya started with the establishment of missionary schools around 1890 (Sifuna 1990: 114).

In the beginning, there were four interest groups involved (Ssekamwa/Lugumba 2001: 11 f.):

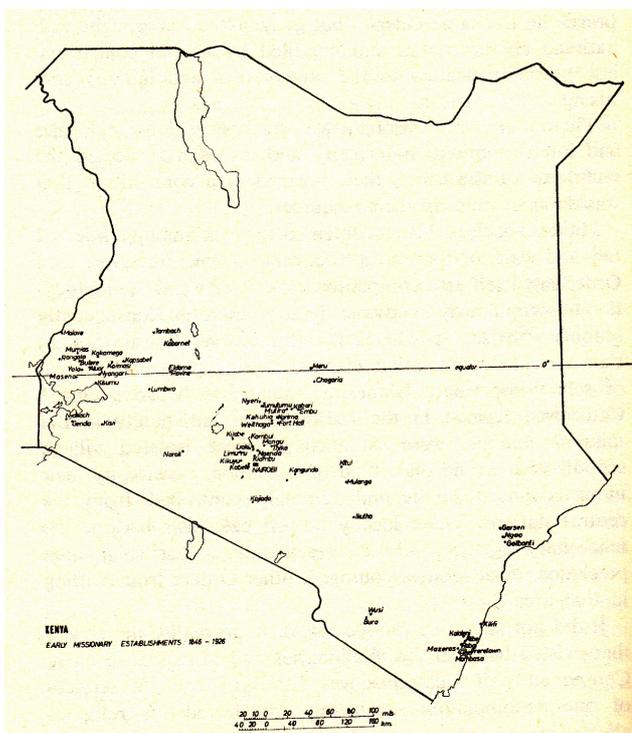
Interest Group	Colonial Administration	Mission Societies	European Settlers	Locals
Goal / Agenda	Peace, submissiveness, economic development	Additional converts	Cheap labor on the farms	Power, prestige, self-sufficiency
Proposition for the curriculum	Vocational training, teaching of hygiene, drill, gardening etc.	Literary Education, Bible Studies	Vocational training	Literary and Higher Education

Table 3: Interest groups and their agendas in the education sector of colonial Kenya

Some aspects to be considered when dealing with the history of Western education in Kenya:

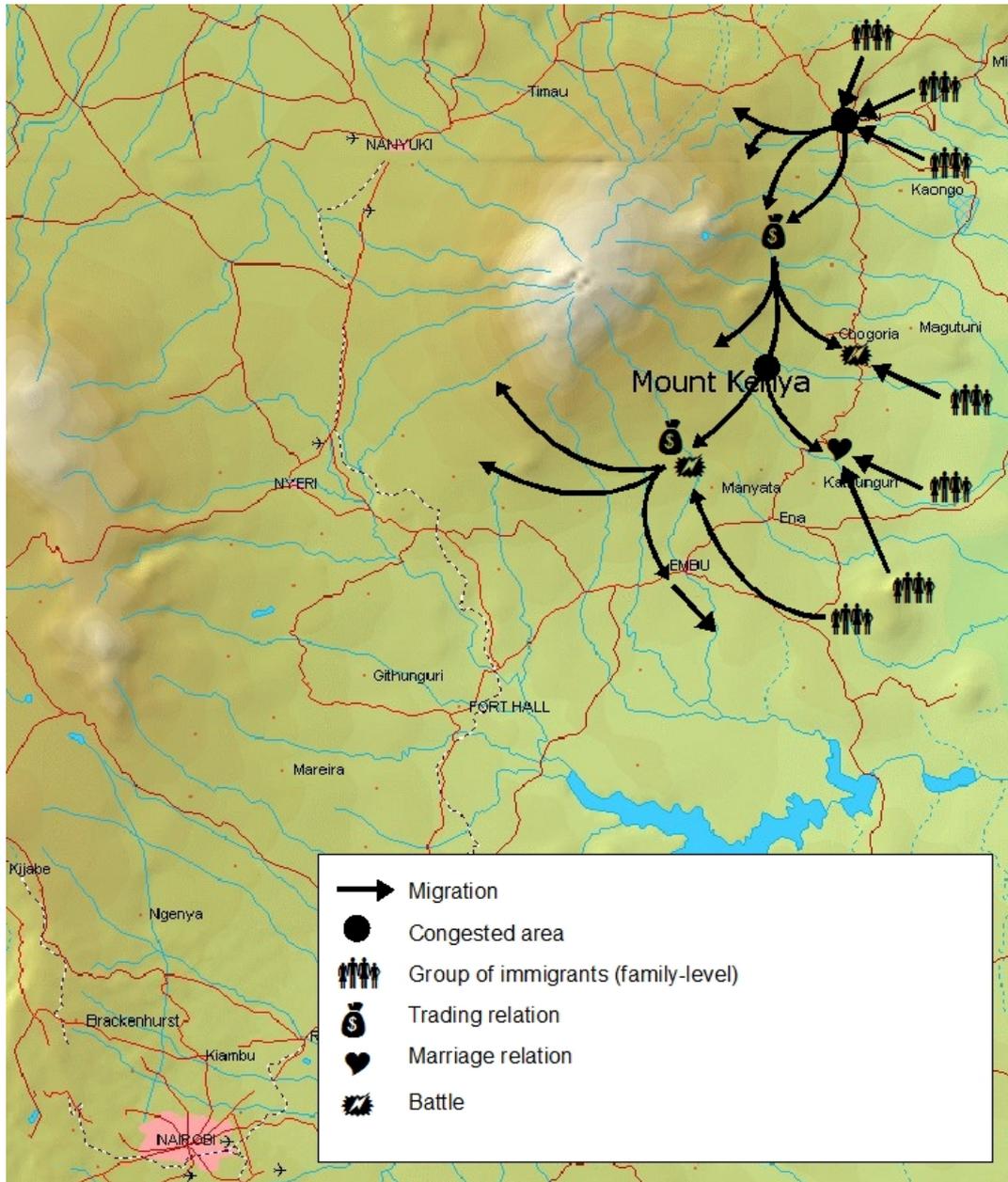
- Low enrolment rates due to (initial) **local resistance** to public schooling and **tuition fees** (free primary education introduced in 1974)
- **Little involvement of the colonial government** in education (schooling mostly in the hands of a total of 15 mission societies, 'grants-in-aid' introduced after WWI)
- **Ineffective teacher training**
- **Mission Schools vs. State Schools vs. Independent Schools**

➔ When dealing with the impact of primary education on the linguistic situation, one needs to rely on **school material** (vernacular text books) rather than official records.



Map 3: Mission establishments in Kenya (Mutua 1975: 24)

### 3. A Historical Scenario: Extra-Linguistic Factors / Parameters



Map 4: Possible migration scenario of Pre-Eastern-Kirinyaga groups (ca. 1600-1900 AD)

#### A "Trend Case" Scenario:

Migration of **small groups of 'pioneers'** (families not 'ethnic groups!') into Central Kenya from **different directions** > Forming of **densely populated areas**, arrival of new immigrants (population pressure) > further movement of migrants uphill and clockwise (?) around Mt. Kenya, additional dispersal

Throughout time, the different sections of population engage in **trading relations**, **marriage relations**, and **military conflicts**. Different social, economic and military **alliances** are formed (= **cultural convergence!**).

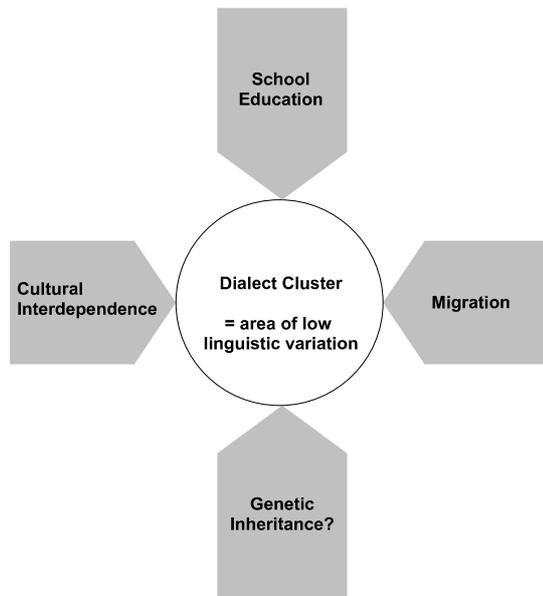
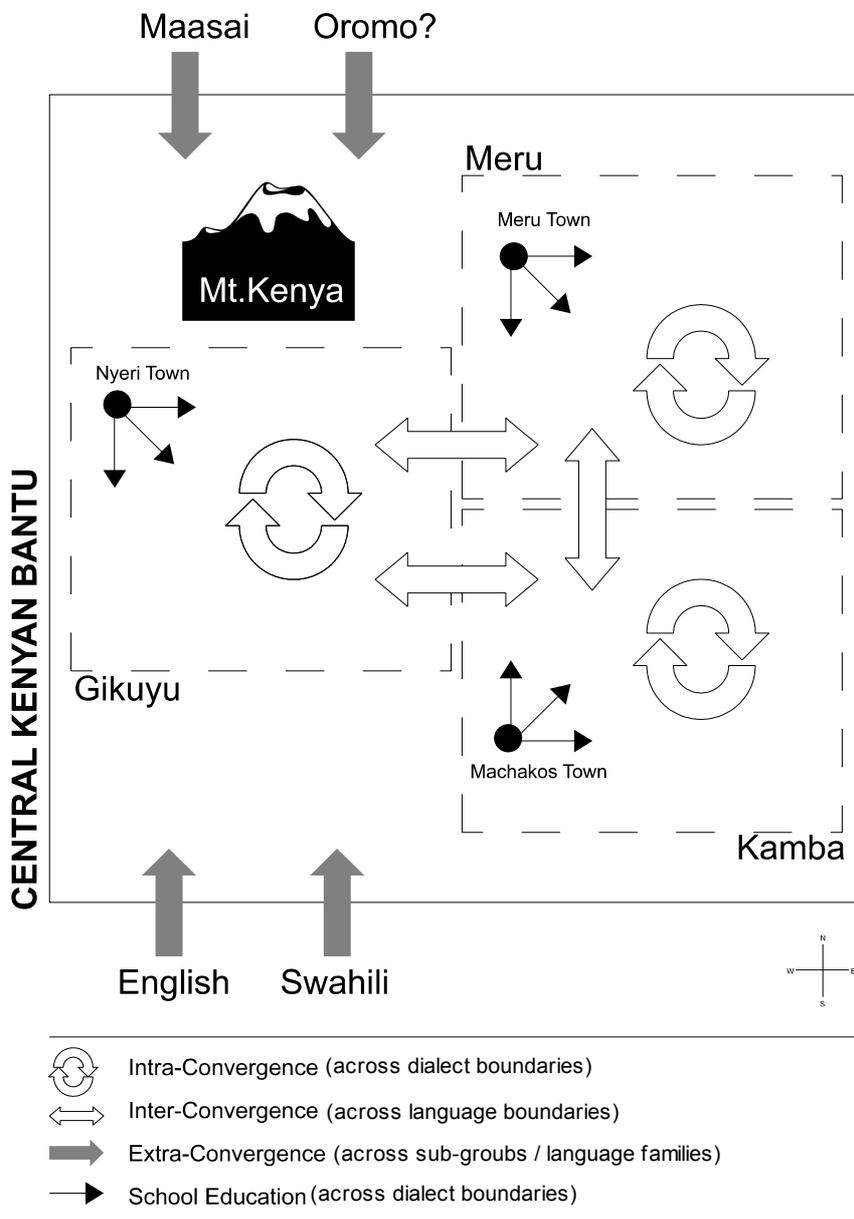


Figure 2: Possible factors in the emergence of dialect clusters



Cartogram: Internal and external linguistic affiliations of the 3 major clusters of CKB

#### 4. The Linguistic Evidence: The Method of Dialectometry

Dialectometry = A **synchronic** means of dialectological analysis; the goal is to **statistically assess linguistic proximity** between languages and dialects (> dialect clusters).

- **Phonological Dialectometry**

measures the **phonetic differences** between dialects by applying the method of *feature analysis* (Jakobson et al. 1952, Chomsky/Halle 1968), e.g. in the dia-series \*MP:

	Gikuyu	Embu/ Mbeere	Chuka	Mwimbi- Muthambi	Igoji	Miutini	Imenti	Tharaka	Kamba
'cat'	<b>mbaka</b>	<b>mbaka</b>	<b>mbaka</b>	<b>mpaka</b>	<b>mpaka</b>	<b>mpaka</b>	<b>mpaka</b>	<b>mpaka</b>	<b>mbaka</b>
'maize'	<b>mbɛmbɛ</b>	<b>mbɛmbɛ</b>	<b>mbɛmbɛ</b>	<b>mpɛmpɛ</b>	<b>mpɛmpɛ</b>	<b>mpɛmpɛ</b>	<b>mpɛmpɛ</b>	<b>mpɛmpɛ</b>	<b>mbɛmbɛ</b>
*MP	mb	mb	mb	mp	mp	mp	mp	mp	mb
[voice]	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	+

Table 4: Feature analysis of dia-phoneme \*MP in CKB

- **Lexical Dialectometry (based on a wordlist with 600 entries)**

measures the **lexical differences** between dialects according to the general parameters **identical, partially divergent, and fully divergent**, e.g. item 025 'left hand':

1.	u.məðɔ	A1	A1:A2 = morph. divergence (3 pts.) A1:B = full divergence (0 pts.) A2: B = full divergence (0 pts.)
2.	kl.məðɔ	A2	
3.	kw.aka	B	

Table 5: Item 025 'left hand' in CKB

- **Nominal-morphological Dialectometry**

measures the differences in the **noun-class systems** (i.e. noun-marker, adjective-marker, pronoun, subject-concord, object-concord) according to the parameters above, e.g. Class 2:

	Noun	Adjective	Subjectmarker	Objectmarker
Chuka	a-	a-	ma-	-ma-
Mwimbi	a-	ba-	ba-	-ba-
	<b>identical</b> 2 Points	<b>partially div.</b> 1 Point	<b>partially div.</b> 1 Point	<b>partially div.</b> 1 Point

Table 6: Class 2 in Chuka and Mwimbi

**Note:** This analysis yields **synchronic results** (a dialectological 'snap-shot')! In order to get an insight into diachronic relations, the linguistic data need to be connected with the extra-linguistic evidence.



## EXAMPLE 2

### Lexical Dialectometry in Kamba (Mumoni, Kitui, Machakos) - Mbeere - Tharaka

Core Vocabulary = Sense perception, the body, kinship etc. - **low tendency to borrowing**

Cultural Vocabulary = Religion, clothing, the house etc. - **high tendency to borrowing**

<b>Mumoni</b>	845				<b>Mumoni</b>	771			
<b>Kitui</b>	934	736			<b>Kitui</b>	792	845		
<b>Mbeere</b>	558	343	394		<b>Mbeere</b>	546	626	695	
<b>Tharaka</b>	258	243	194	400	<b>Tharaka</b>	464	604	655	385
	<b>Machakos</b>	<b>Mumoni</b>	<b>Kitui</b>	<b>Mbeere</b>		<b>Machakos</b>	<b>Mumoni</b>	<b>Kitui</b>	<b>Mbeere</b>

Matrix 2: *The body*

Matrix 3: *The house*

<p>934 Masaku : Kitui              845 Masaku : Mumoni              763 Mumoni : Kitui              558 Masaku : Mbeere  <b>400 Mbeere : Tharaka</b>              394 Mbeere : Kitui              343 Mbeere : Mumoni              258 Masaku : Tharaka              243 Mumoni : Tharaka  <b>194 Kitui : Tharaka</b></p>	<p>845 Mumoni : Kitui              792 Masaku : Kitui              771 Masaku : Mumoni              695 Mbeere : Kitui  <b>655 Kitui : Tharaka</b>              626 Mbeere : Mumoni              604 Mumoni : Tharaka              546 Masaku : Mbeere              464 Masaku : Mbeere  <b>385 Mbeere : Tharaka</b></p>
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Cluster	Identity Value	Compared Lexicon	Comment
Mbeere-Tharaka	400	Core Vocab	Possibly genetic affiliation
Kitui-Tharaka	194	Core Vocab	Relatively low level of affiliation

Table 8: *Sample of shared core vocabulary Kamba - Mbeere - Tharaka*

Cluster	Identity Value	Compared Lexicon	Comment
Kitui-Tharaka	655	Cultural Vocab	↔ Inter-Convergence: Interaction
Mbeere-Tharaka	385	Cultural Vocab	Relatively low level of affiliation: little (recent) cultural contact

Table 9: *Sample of shared cultural vocabulary Kamba - Mbeere - Tharaka*

➔ The results indicate: The Kitui-Kamba have been more influential on Mbeere and Tharaka than the two have been on each other.\*

Kitui is a **center of innovation!**

\* as far as the semantic domain 'the house' is concerned

### EXAMPLE 3

#### Qualitative Analysis: Identifying Loans

198 'wall'	Swahili <i>ukuta</i> >	<b>ukuta</b>	Machakos
		uvai	Kitui
		ruḏingo	Gikuyu, Embu/Mbeere, Chuka, Meru
226 'water pot'	Swahili <i>mbisu</i> >	<b>mbisu</b>	Kitui
		<b>mbiso</b>	Machakos
		mutungi	Yatta, Kitui
		ɲungu	Gikuyu, Embu/Mbeere, Chuka, Meru, Machakos
265 'field'	Swahili <i>shamba</i> >	<b>samba</b>	Kitui
	Swahili <i>kiwanja</i> >	<b>kiwanza</b>	Machakos, Kitui
		<b>kigwanja</b>	Muthambi
		kɪɛ:ni	Meru, Tharaka
		kɪba:rɔ	Chuka, Embu/Mbeere

Table 10: Swahili loans in CKB

➔ The relatively low lexical variation in Kamba is *inter alia* due to heavy influence from Swahili; the Kamba-dialects of Kitui and Machakos are possible **centers of innovation**, i.e. 'epicenters' of Swahili loanwords in CKB (⇒ **Extra-Convergence**).

### EXAMPLE 4

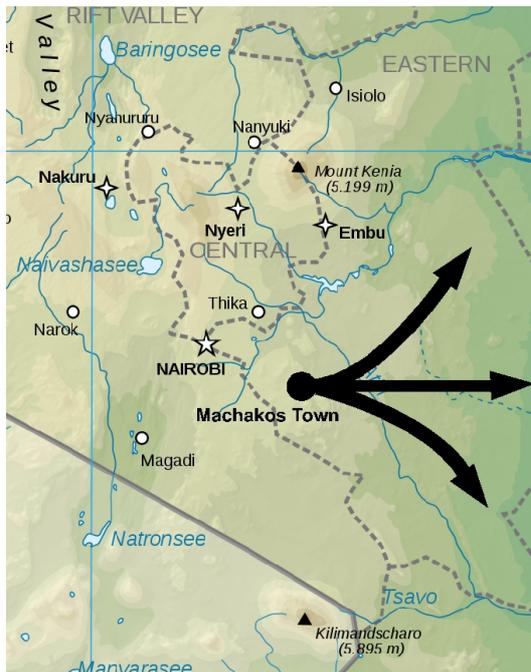
#### The Influence of School Education

Machakos District in Ukambani shows very little phonological, lexical and nominal-morphological variation (= 'strong' cluster); the first government school was established in Machakos Town in 1914.

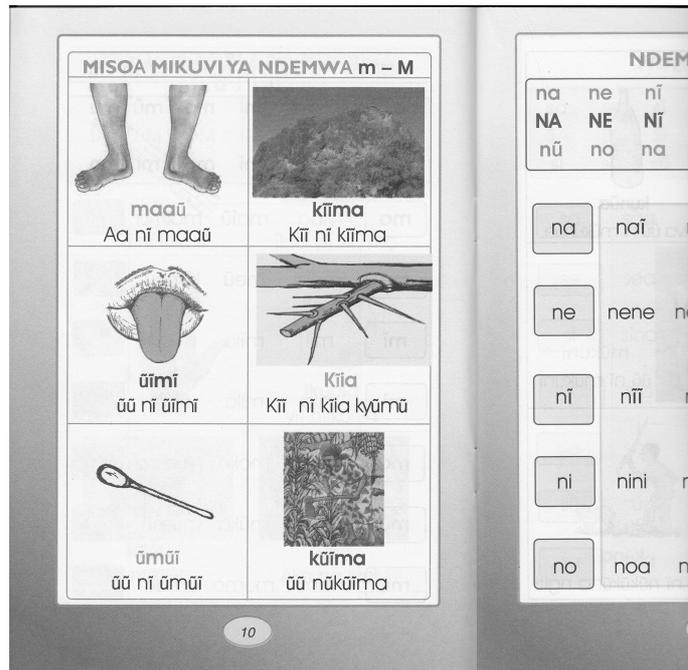
Dialect	Wordform	Occurrence
Machakos	u.mi A1	90%
	u.me A2	10%
Yatta	u.mi A1	50%
	u.me A2	50%
Kitui	u.mi A1	54%
	u.me A2	21%
	w.me A3	17%
	w.mi A4	8%

Table 11: The distribution of 017 'tongue' in Kamba

→ The form *u.mi* has possibly spread via school education from Machakos throughout the rest of Ukambani.



Map 5: Possible spread of 'u.mi'



'u.mi' (017 'tongue) in a Kamba text book (Watuma 2004: 10)

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