

This is a phonological study of the Gikuyu loanwords derived from English. Using an inductive approach to data analysis and a multi linear framework of description, the study identifies three aspects of loanword adaptation: phonemic, phonotactic, and prosodic. Phonemic adaptation addresses the grammatical constraints of unitary sound substitution: namely phonemic merger and phonemic split. Phonotactic adaptation defines the harmonic motivation of phonemic combination and distribution in the loanword. Prosodic adaptation considers the principles of syllabification and the assignment of the prosodic features.

Four generalizations are drawn from this research. The phoneme is a minimal distinctive unit which responds to the phonetic, semantic, and morphological, constraints of the lexical structure. The syllable functions at the core of the phonological organization whereby it regulates the combination of the phonemes, the prosodic features, and the appropriate phonetic shape of the phonological word. The phonological word is a most fundamental grammatical licenser which ultimately programmes the function of the phoneme, the syllable, and each of the prosodic features. The phoneme, the syllable, and the phonological word, are essential constructs of the phonological organization and, therefore, speech production and speech perception.