Bantu Words in American English

Week 11 Lecture 02
African Contributions Part 4

This lecture was last updated on 08 May, 2017
This lecture was last updated on 15 November, 2014
Bantu Words in American English:
The learning objectives for week 11 part 02 are:

– to understand the main facts about the slave trade as they help to understand African contributions to the Americas
– to learn some of the ways in which African Bantu languages have influenced the development of American English
Bantu Words in American English

Terms you should know for week 11 part 02 are:

- Middle passage
- Bantu languages
- Slang
- Black English (African-American Vernacular English)
- Play the dozens: the "dozens" is a form of competitive poetry common among African Americans. It is probably the origin of rap and has its own origin in the Bantu languages of Africa where competitive poetry is also common.
Bantu Words in American English

Week 11 Additional Sources: Updated 2011 and 2017


Voyages: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database. [http://slavevoyages.org](http://slavevoyages.org)
Bantu Words in American English

The Week 11 Lecture
02 is based primarily on

Bantu Words in American English

1. The English language is the most important language in the world today.
   – 360 million native speakers
   – Up to 1.5 billion who speak English as a second language
Bantu Words in American English

2. English spoken in widely different parts of the world
   – Spread largely because of British empire, once the world’s largest
Bantu Words in American English

3. The wide geographic spread of English over the past 400 years has led to regional accents and vocabulary differences from original, “British” English.

4. We have Jamaican English, Indian English, South African English...and...
Bantu Words in American English

5. American English

6. American English was influenced by about 200 words from Native Americans as we noted earlier in the course: including the names of about 26 US states. We saw examples in week 06.
Bantu Words in American English

7. Many New Jersey place names are also from Native American words:
   – Watchung [hill]
   – Kittatinny [great hills]
   – Hackensack [a local clan name]
   – Wanaque [place where the sassafrass grows]
Bantu Words in American English

8. You can look up New Jersey place names and their origins at:

http://www.getnj.com/origname/origintro.shtml

Native American names are highlighted in red and are translated into English.
Bantu Words in American English

9. American English differs from British English:

– A lorry is a truck.
– A lift is an elevator.
– A fortnight is two weeks.
– A chemist is a person who works in a drugstore.
– A dual carriageway is a divided highway.
Bantu Words in American English

9. American English has received minor influences from many immigrant groups and their languages:
Bantu Words in American English

10. French:
   – À la carte
   – Adieu
   – Au pair
   – Chic
   – Prairie
Bantu Words in American English

11. Spanish
   – Canyon
   – Mesa
   – Ranch
   – Albino
   – armada
Bantu Words in American English

12. Dutch
   – Kill [small streams in NYC area]
   – Stoop
   – Hock
   – Brandy
   – Apartheid
   – Decoy
Bantu Words in American English

13. German

- Hamburger
- Wiener
- Kindergarten
- Delicatessen
- Diesel
Bantu Words in American English

14. Italian
   – Umbrella
   – Bank
   – Ghetto
   – Graffiti
   – America
Bantu Words in American English

15. Russian
   – Bistro
   – Pogrom
   – Vodka
   – Steppe
Bantu Words in American English

16. Yiddish
   – Schmooze
   – Chutzpah
   – Kvetsch
   – Nosh
   – Nudnik
Bantu Words in American English

17. Arabic
   - Admiral
   - Alcohol
   - Algebra
   - candy
   - Genie
   - Mafia
   - magazine
   - Mattress
   - Zero
Bantu Words in American English

18. Hindi

– Bangle
– Cot
– Dungaree
– Jungle
– Shampoo
– sugar
Bantu Words in American English

19. Farsi (Persian; Iranian)
   – Caravan
   – Azure
   – Khaki
   – Serendipity
   – Tiger
Bantu Words in American English

20. Chinese
   – Ginseng
   – Chow mein
   – Ketchup
   – Kowtow
   – Tea
Bantu Words in American English

21. Japanese
   – Bonsai
   – Origami
   – Honcho
   – Futon
   – Tofu
Bantu Words in American English

22. Dravidian [South Indian] languages

- Pariah
- Teak
- Curry
- Atoll
- Mango
Bantu Words in American English

22a. Ancient Egyptian

– Pyramid

– Desert (from ancient Egyptian deser meaning “red”)

– Paper (from Egyptian papyrus)

– diamond
Update: 15 November, 2014

Bantu Words in American English

22b. Hawaiian

- Aloha
- Hula
- Ukulele
- Wiki (as in a wiki or Wikipedia)
- Wiki means “fast” in Hawaiian. For more info on how Wikipedia got its name, click here.
Foreign Words in American English

22c. If you like this kind of thing, you can surf around for all kinds of English words of origins you might not have expected:

Bantu Words in American English

22d. Words travel the world following migrations, conquests and adoption.

Consider the ancient Egyptian word “djebet” or “mud brick.”
Bantu Words in American English

22e. It became “tobe” in Coptic, widely thought to be the later Egyptian in use at the time of the Arab conquests....
Bantu Words in American English

22f. The Arabs around 640 CE put a definite article “al” on it as is customary in their language and it became “al-tuba.”
Bantu Words in American English

22g. Then they brought it to Spain as “adobar,” after which the Spanish conquistadors took it to the North American continent in our “Southwest” area where after 4,000 years and 7,000 miles of travel it finally landed as...
Bantu Words in American English

22h. Adobe

Bantu Words in American English

23. Less well known is the influence of the African languages on English...

...particularly American English
Bantu Words in American English

24. The Bantu languages are widely distributed in Africa.
Bantu Words in American English

25. There are estimated to be 310 million speakers of Bantu languages

26. A few years ago a woman named Winifred Kellersberger was studying at UCLA.
Bantu Words in American English

27. She had grown up the daughter of Christian missionaries in Zaire, Central Africa [where the Ishango Bone was found]

28. Kellersberger was trilingual in English, French [the government language in Zaire]...and...
Bantu Words in American English

29. Tshiluba...a Bantu language spoken by her African schoolmates and common in Katanga Province of Zaire.

30. Tshiluba has 47% Bantu based vocabulary.
Bantu Words in American English

31. Kellersberger was struck by the resemblance of some of the phrases used by her African American classmates at UCLA...they sounded a bit “Bantu.”

32. So, she decided to study Bantu influences on American English for her Ph D dissertation.
Bantu Words in American English

33. There hardly could have been a better fit between student and study.

34. Kellersberger developed a logical design for her research:
Bantu Words in American English

35. Bantu words came into English via the slave trade.

36. Therefore the slave trade had to bring Bantu speakers into the US

37. And...she had to find a mechanism to explain how Bantu words would get borrowed into English.
Bantu Words in American English

38. Let’s begin with the slave trade – you already know some things about it from the reading for this week – topic 01, the African rice contributions as described in Judith Carney’s book and the lecture for this week on African rice.
Slave Trade Facts: Updated 2011

39. How Many Came?

See Week 11

Lecture 01 (on African rice)

Slides 65–75

for the basic facts now updated and more detailed…then…
Slave Trade Facts

40. By about 1850 1/3 of all Africans lived outside Africa.

41. Who were the traders?

- Portuguese
- Spanish
- Dutch
- French
- British
- North Americans
- Cubans
- Brazilians
- Some local Africans
Slave Trade Facts

42. Who supported the slave trade?
   – In 1808, the US Congress outlawed the slave trade. Merchants were able to continue slave trading in the New World until 1870. Slavery was abolished legally within the United States in 1865 by the 13th Amendment to the Constitution.
Slave Trade Facts

43. From where did they come?
   - From 1701 to 1810 about 59% came from West Africa: Senegambia, Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast (modern-day Ghana), etc.
Slave Trade Facts

44. From where else?

- The other 41% came from the coast of Angola (Angola=Gullah, the name of the Sea Island peoples off the U. S. Georgia coast) and from south and eastern Africa—that is, from Bantu speaking areas.
Slave Trade Facts

45. What languages did they speak?

- A large proportion spoke types of Bantu
- The peak US slave importing years were 1741-1810, coinciding with the period when most slaves imported came from Bantu speaking areas, especially Angola.
Slave Trade Facts

46. Where did the slaves go in the New World?

- North America: 7%
- (U. S. 5%)
- Caribbean: 42%
- South America 49%
Slave Trade Facts

47. Some of the major Bantu languages are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kongo</th>
<th>Lwena</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rundi</td>
<td>Swahili</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shona</td>
<td>Zulu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tshiluba</td>
<td>Bemba</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Slave Trade Facts

48. Kellersberger discovered that Bantu languages are a more likely source for American English words than are West African languages, even though slightly more West African slaves came to the US overall.
Slave Trade Facts

49. The reason is that Bantu languages have more common features among themselves than do the more diverse West African languages and thus the Bantu speakers had more opportunities to share common words on the slave plantations.
Slave Trade Facts

50. This meant they could maintain parts of their vocabulary against the pressures of the plantation culture to abandon their languages and learn English only.

51. While some West African grammatical forms came to influence black English in the US, Bantu words became absorbed into both black and white English.
Bantu Words in American English

52. Kellersberger also came up with a social mechanism to explain language adoption:

53. Conquerors tend to impose their vocabulary at the top of the status hierarchy of a language: the “high” language.
Bantu Words in American English

54. For example, French words are “high” words in English because, after AD 1066, William the Conqueror imposed French via the English court and aristocracy. Anglo-Saxon words are the roots for coarse and filthy talk. (All “dirty” – four letter – words in English are Anglo-Saxon; none are French.)
Bantu Words in American English

55. Bantu words in American English had to make their way up from the bottom of the status hierarchy, and therefore we see them mostly in the arena of what we call “slang.”

56. The word “slang” is officially “of unknown origin.”
# Bantu Words in American English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English Word</th>
<th>English Meaning</th>
<th>Bantu Word</th>
<th>Bantu Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ballyhoo</td>
<td>Publicity, blatant advertising</td>
<td>Balapu</td>
<td>Read about it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banjo</td>
<td>Stringed instrument</td>
<td>Mbanza</td>
<td>Stringed instrument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boogie-woogie</td>
<td>Instrumental blues for piano, using melodic variations over a constantly repeated bass figure</td>
<td>Mbuki-mwuki</td>
<td>To shuck off clothes and dance with abandon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bodacious</td>
<td>Extreme(ly)</td>
<td>Botesha</td>
<td>To pulverize to the finest grind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cahootin</td>
<td>To go along at high speed</td>
<td>Kahuta</td>
<td>To trail along</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diddle</td>
<td>To cheat, swindle</td>
<td>Dinga</td>
<td>To trick, cheat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goober</td>
<td>Peanut</td>
<td>Nguba</td>
<td>Peanut</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gumbo</td>
<td>Southern dish of okra, corn, butterbeans, etc.</td>
<td>Kingumbo</td>
<td>Okra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hullabaloo</td>
<td>Noise, uproar</td>
<td>Halua-balualua</td>
<td>When come those that are coming</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Montclair State University Department of Anthropology
Anth 140: Non Western Contributions to the Western World
Dr. Richard W. Franke
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jambalaya</td>
<td>Creole dish of tomatoes, onions, shrimp, etc.</td>
<td>Tshimbolebole</td>
<td>Dish of tender cooked corn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jazz</td>
<td>Music originating in New Orleans</td>
<td>Jaja</td>
<td>Cause to dance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jiffy</td>
<td>In a moment</td>
<td>Tshipi</td>
<td>In a moment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jive</td>
<td>Insincere talk</td>
<td>Tshivuma</td>
<td>The noise of talking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jubilee</td>
<td>Celebration</td>
<td>Diuba, juba</td>
<td>To beat the time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kook</td>
<td>Unusual, peculiar person</td>
<td>Kuku</td>
<td>Dolt, blockhead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lollygag</td>
<td>To be idle, loaf</td>
<td>Lalakana</td>
<td>To wander about aimlessly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Word</td>
<td>English Meaning</td>
<td>Bantu Word</td>
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</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mooch</td>
<td>To pilfer; to acquire by petty thievery</td>
<td>Umusha</td>
<td>To remove from its place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play the dozens</td>
<td>Slander one’s or another’s parents</td>
<td>Mpala disonguela</td>
<td>I refuse the slander</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruckus</td>
<td>Noisy commotion</td>
<td>Lukashi</td>
<td>Loud clapping, shouts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tote</td>
<td>Carry, pick up</td>
<td>Tota</td>
<td>Lift, carry, pick up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yam</td>
<td>Red sweet potato</td>
<td>Nyambi</td>
<td>Sweet potato</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Update 2017
(American) Black English

The importance of slang in American Black English should not lead us to think of Black English as an “inferior” language. Or – as bad or imperfect English.
Update 2017

(American) Black English

U.S. African-American linguist John McWhorter explains in his 2017 book...
Update 2017

(American) Black English

How American Black English is a logical and rule-based dialect of what is called “standard English.” Various forms of English occur around the world.
Update 2017
(American) Black English

Check out McWhorter’s book: he explains how the following words have different meanings in Black English than in other forms of English:

Be  Up
Done  Had

You will be surprised at what you will discover.

And he provides much additional insight into how language works in multicultural societies like ours.
(American) Black English

And learn what the “N-word” really means and why there are two such words, not one.
Bantu Words in American English

End of Week 11
Lecture 02
African Contributions Part 4