

LOANWORDS: THE CASE OF IGBO LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

Language is a human attribute and has been in use since man's existence. Of old, human beings lived in closed societies, sharing little or nothing with members of different races, cultures and tongues. It was then easy to identify people merely by hearing them speak. But today's world is a lot different as information flow has become common and with the development of the world into a global village, languages are constantly in contact as people are no longer content with living in their various cocoons. This has encouraged interpersonal relationships between people of diverse tongues thus bringing people in situations of language interplay and thus encourage loaning. All languages borrow words from other languages and treat them as if they were their own. This paper discusses reasons for loanwords, different types of loanwords and their effects on Igbo language. It also makes suggestions on the way forward.

1. INTRODUCTION

Languages do not exist in a vacuum. There is always a linguistic contact between groups. When speakers of different languages interact closely, it is typical that these languages influence one another. Language contact can occur at language borders or as a result of immigration. Language contact occurs in a variety of phenomena including language convergence, borrowing or loanwords and relexification. The most common way that languages influence each other is by the exchange of words. This contact influences what loanwords are integrated into the lexicon of any given language. We are therefore, looking at the affects of loanwords generally and particularly in Igbo language.

2. LOANWORDS

Bellos (2011:179) observes that, “*when a receiving language didn't have a word for some item, it got a new one – the word of the source language adapted to its new linguistic home*”. From the above, loanwords are words adapted by the speakers of one language from a different language. It can also be said to be a consequence of a cultural contact between two language communities.

Also, according to Wikipedia, “*Loanwords are those words imported and adapted from another language, either directly or indirectly, and might have undergone phonological or orthographical changes*”. Words are the building blocks of language. And language cannot be isolated from the social context in which it is embedded. Borrowing contributes to vocabulary change. According to

Vinay et Darbelnet (2004:129) loanwords are used to “*overcome a lacuna, usually a metalinguistic one as a new technical process, an unknown concept*”.

2.1 DIFFERENT TYPES OF LOANWORDS/BORROWING

There are two major types of borrowing: inter and intra borrowing.

2.2 INTER BORROWING:

Inter borrowing is the borrowing between countries or nations, for example English borrows from French and vice versa. Inter borrowing is not something new. It has been in existence for ages. It is not restricted to any language. It is universal. An interesting phenomenon is that people tend to borrow from languages they look up to, languages with a higher status, though not necessarily in every aspect but at least in some specific areas. But, Bellos (2011:171) is of different opinion, he posits that, “*every human language serves as a full means of communication for some community, and in that case, there is no hierarchy between them.*” In other words, no language is superior to the other; they all borrow from one another.

Here are some examples of inter borrowing. The languages from which borrowings were made are on the left while the borrowing languages are on the right.

English	French	
Weekend	le weekend	
Parking	le parking	etc.

French	English
Cul de sac	cul de sac
Bureau	bureau
Rendez-vous	rendez vous
Coup d'état	coup d'état
Tête à tête	tête à tête
Enfant terrible	enfant terrible etc.

English	Igbo
Wire	waya
Hour	awa etc.

French	Nigerian languages
Beaucoup	bọkwu
Espagne	pagna

There are still many Latin words in English, especially in legal proceedings documents and legal canons or maxims. Examples of such words are: *mortis causa, salvis juribus, ab initio ipso facto, a priori* etc. Cao (2007:57) on this observes that, “*borrowing and neologisms are much common in legal systems that are in the process of establishment or developing than in more mature or established systems*”.

There is also inter borrowing between the languages of Nigeria due to proximity and closeness. Nigeria is a heterogeneous country. Some examples of inter borrowing are:

Hausa	Igbo
Gyra	jara
Suya	suya
Bulala	bulala
Banza	banza etc.

Yoruba	Igbo
Akamu	akamu
Akara	akara
Asawo	ashawo
Moin-moin	moin-moin
Wayo	wayo etc

Igbo	Nigerian Languages
Onugbu	onugbu
Isi ewu	isi ewu
nkwoḅi	nkwoḅi
ugba	ugba etc.

2.2. INTRA BORROWING

This type of borrowing occurs within the languages of the same community, with some variations. This occurs within the different dialects of the same language. Some examples in Igbo language are:

English	Igbo
Crayfish	ayiya, ayoro, isha ...
Duck	odoliigbo, oḅogwu, oḅagwu
Float	ise, igbabe
Filter	iza, nza
Frog	akiri, akare, mbara
Well	omi, umi
Feather	abuḅa, ugberere, ugbele
Liver	imeju, umeju
Kerosene	kreozin, karojim
Tortoise	mbe, mbekwu, nnabe
Wall gecko	ncheke, ncheuno, aguuno etc.

3. REASONS FOR LOANWORDS

All languages are guilty of borrowing. In this era of globalization, new words are churned out. Most countries, especially the developing ones, in an attempt to meet up resort to borrowing. They gradually introduce the new words into their lexicon, and over time, treat them as if they were their own. Vinay and Darbelnet (2004:129) opines that “*some well established, mainly older borrowings are also widely used that they are no longer considered as such and have become part of the respective language lexicon*”. For example, *enfant terrible, chic, rendez-vous*. The following are some of the reasons for borrowing. Vinay and Darbelnet, (2004:47) while explaining loanwords intimate us that many of the loanwords found their ways into the new language, thanks to the work

of translators. They went further to explain that some translators resort to loan words just for the stylistic effect it has on a piece of work or to add to local colour.

3.1. INTRODUCTION OF NEW CONCEPTS:

Sometimes, new concepts are introduced especially in areas associated with computers, technology into other languages because such concepts are lacking in the receptor language. Games retain the names given to them by their originators, e.g. Football, handball, ski, volley etc.

3.2 . INFERIORITY COMPLEX:

Some languages tend to borrow from languages they look up to. For example, minority languages borrow numerous words from dominant languages in the same physical space. Spanish and Chinese have adapted and integrated countless words from English; Nigeria has equally borrowed numeral words from English.

3.3 . CONTACT:

Languages are always in contact. This contact occurs in different ways: through business, immigration, religion, technical vocabulary, scientific discoveries etc.

3.4. SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DIFFERENCES:

Another reason for loanwords is the need to find a term for an unfamiliar thing, animal, or cultural device. Borrowing seems to be the easiest solution to the problem. For example we have music terms borrowed from Italian by all languages. Soprano, Tenor, Bass etc, we equally have whisky, brandy etc.

3.5. CODE-SWITCHING

This is the art of a speaker moving from one language to another and back again. It may involve single words or whole clauses. If code-switching becomes widespread and generally accepted, it becomes part of the language over time.

4. EFFECTS OF LOANWORDS

Loanwords imported into other languages are either retained as they are or they undergo some modifications. Such loanwords may undergo semantic, orthographic or phonological modifications that enable them function or adapt properly in the new language.

4.1. SEMANTIC MODIFICATION

Some loanwords are seemingly the same in the receptor language but not without some nuances of meaning that distinguish them from the source language. The word *chance* in French means *luck* as in the expression *avoir de la chance*. A structurally exact word exists in English but *chance* in the English context connotes some elements of luck in such sentences as in the expression *take a chance*. However, the French expression *avoir de la chance* cannot be translated as *I have a chance*. Sometimes, the process of loaning can result in polysemy or even semantic drifting, in which case the meaning in the receptor language is different from the original usage. The German word *Handy* borrowed from English means *mobile phone*. Tsunami that occurred in New Orleans is now used to refer to any serious crisis in any sphere of life. Bringing it nearer home, the Igala word *Onukwu* which represents a maiden that sacrificed her life for her people is imported into Igbo language as a stupid person. The example of some bilingual countries is very pertinent here, where as a result

of two or more languages coming in constant contact, a lot of lexicosemantic matching take place. For example, the expression, *bon après midi* only means *have a nice afternoon* in the typical francophone culture, but in bilingual countries like Canada and Cameroun where the English language is constant contact with French, the expression has come to be used as a greeting to mean “good afternoon”.

4.2 ORTHOGRAPHIC MODIFICATION

Some loanwords are spelt differently; such words undergo an appropriation in the receptor language. An instance could be drawn from the Igbo language which does not tolerate syllables with two consonantal sounds together. Even when loanwords are adopted into Igbo language, it is modified to follow this pattern of syllabic progression.

e.g.	English	Igbo
	Table	tebulu
	Dirt	ḍoti

4.3 CHANGES IN PRONUNCIATION

Most languages modify foreign words to fit native pronunciation patterns. The pronunciation pattern varies from country to country and from culture to culture. For example, the Igbo language has this mannerism of pronouncing a vowel after a consonant. Igbo lexicography adopts this pattern. This being the case, any loanword that does not follow the VCVC (vowel consonant vowel consonant) pattern is bound to experience some deformation in form of phonological matching where the loanword is matched with an existing phonological pattern. Also some sounds are non-existent in some languages such that when such words are imported, they cannot be pronounced correctly. Nasal words imported into English face this type of problem. Words like *en masse*, *enterrement*, *chauffeur*, *raison d'être* face mispronunciation due to this situation.

French	English
Champagne	Champagne
Cul de sac	Cul de sac
Bureau de change	Bureau de change

English	French
Camping	Camping
Parking	Parking

English	Igbo
Hour	Awa
Wire	Waya
Table	tebulu

4.4 DIRECT LOANWORDS

Loanwords could be the only way out for a translator when faced with a word that has no equivalent in the receiving culture. For example, most terms for classical music are borrowed verbatim from Italian, e.g. *Concerto*, *Tempo*, *Allegro*, *Soprano* etc. in religion there are words like *Hijab*, *Hajj*, *Sabbath*, *Guru* from Hinduism, *Baptisma* from Greek, *Missa* from Latin. Medicine uses a large number of Latin terms e.g. *Appendix*, *Sternum* etc. also in Igbo, words like *ofọ* as used in *ejim ogu*, *ejim ofọ* cannot be translated into other languages due to heavy cultural connotation they are laden

with. Traditional titles and ceremonies such as *ozọ* can never be find equivalents in other cultures and languages. Under such circumstances, one is left with no choice but to borrow the words as they are in the original language.

4.5 EFFECTS OF LOANWORDS ON IGBO LANGUAGE

Igbo languages like many other languages borrow from other languages of the world and languages from within. Loanwords have both advantages and disadvantages. As already mentioned, loanwords have contributed to vocabulary development in Igbo language. They have also helped in filling the gaps where there are no immediate words. Bellos (2011:160) observes that, “*languages tend to have words their users need and not have words for things never used or encountered*”. These loanwords are direct borrowing, adaptation or substitution as noted by Ugwuoke (1997:170). Below are some examples of direct loanwords in Igbo from different languages.

4.5.1 DIRECT BORROWING

English	Igbo
Atom	atom
Carrot	karrot
Limbo	limbo
Stanza	stanza
Hausa	Igbo
Banza	banza
Suya	suya
Bulala	bulala
Efik	Igbo
Ekpo	ekpo
Isam	isam
Yoruba	Igbo
Dada	dada
Iba	iba
Koboko	koboko etc.

We have equally cited some examples of direct loanwords from some Igbo dictionaries.

English	Igbo
Epigram	epigram
Fauna	fauna
Piano	piano
Manifesto	manifesto
Mulatto	mulato
Opera	opera
Lumbago	lumbago etc.

4.5.2 ADAPTATION

Progress has also been made in adapting some loanwords into Igbo by changing the spellings or sounds of the loanwords to fit into the Igbo orthography and sound system. The following are some examples.

English	Igbo
Aspect	asipekiti
Earring	iyerinti
Case	keesi
Court messenger	kotuma
Gender	jenda
Spelling	nsupe
x-ray	esireè etc.
Arab/Hausa	Igbo
Allahu akbar	alakuba
Albasa	alubasa
Dogonyaro	dogwoyaro
Hausa	awusa
Goro	gworo etc.
Yoruba	Igbo
Agbero	agboro
Simi	shimi
French	Igbo
Beaucoup	bokwu
Chiffon	ichafu etc.
Efik	Igbo
Abasi	Obasi
Yoruba	Igbo
Elubo	alibo

But with the recent trend of globalization and multilingualism, there has grown this tendency to equate globalization with westernization, forcing the less civilized nations to abandon their cultural heritage including their language in quest of all that is western. This explains the various attempts by different nations to study English and French. Even among the elites, there is this misconception that fluency in the Western languages is the only proof enlightenment. Thus, even the uneducated strive to identify with the language for recognition and social up-liftment and considerations. The result is that even in families and traditional settings in Igbo land, conversations are held amid loanwords and a lot of code switching and code mixing. Over time, the loanwords displace the native words and are fully integrated into the receptor language.

Some linguists have tried to shift from loanwords to avert or at least delay the Igbo language extinction. As Azuonye (2002:1) already claims, the language has entered the list of the endangered languages, judging by the percentage loss of speakers it records annually as well as the zeal of the

Igbo speakers to continue using the language and the proportion of loanwords that infiltrate into the language yearly. Here are some examples of the efforts made by Igbo linguists cited from Igbo Metalanguage, some Igbo dictionaries and research works.

English	Igbo
Abbreviation	ndebiri, nkubiri
Affix	mgbakwunyeye
Consonant	mgbochiume
Vowels	ụdaume
Artery	akwara
Bible	akwụkwọ nsọ
Metalanguage	ọkaasụsụ
Oxymoron	nhagideokwu
Epigram	akpụokwu
Grammar	ụtọasụsụ
Rhyme	ndakọrịta
Ambassador	onye nnọchita
Influenza	ọsụngwodongwo
AIDS	ọria mminwụ
Tetanus	nkuchieze
Typhoid	ọria mgbịrị afọ etc.

Conclusion

We commend the efforts made so far by terminology researchers and developers. However, we can not relax and go to sleep. There is a lot more to be done. No limit exists to the number of words that can be generated in any language. (Katamba,1994:195). Languages are evolving at a very high speed. Igbo language is still lagging behind in the area of technology, information technology. Efforts should be channeled towards this direction so as to discourage borrowing. Words created should be used and not dumped in research institutions or libraries to rot. This can be done by creating awareness through the media. The body charged with the standardization of Igbo language should brace up to their responsibilities. All stakeholders in language promotion should be involved. Our language is our identity. Bellos (2011:349) posits that. “*Language is ethnicity*” it is one of the basic parts of identity. If we lose our language we have lost a whole culture and in effect our identity.

Nelson Mandela in one of his speeches culled from Omniglot website (www.omniglot.com/languagewhy.htm) made this wonderful remark about one’s language

“if you speak to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his own language, that goes to his heart”.

We should not let our language to go into extinction. Our language is our pride. Let us do all in our power to protect our language.

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