

REVIEW ARTICLE



Interlingual Borrowing Of Words: A Viable Option For The Emergency Of An Acceptable Lingua-Franca In Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper attempts to find out the extent of truth in the inter-lingual loaning/borrowing of words as a viable option for the emergence of an acceptable lingua-franca in Nigeria. The paper explains loaning/ borrowing as the assimilation in form, spelling and pronunciation that exists between one language and another; whether foreign or local languages. The examination of various views of linguists and non-linguists alike in relation to the issue of lingua-franca shows that political, religious, ethnic and socio-linguistic differences act in unison to frustrate the emergence of a lingua-franca.

1 | INTRODUCTION

In studying Nigerian languages, it becomes necessary to re-examine the possibility of one language (or a blend of languages) emerging as an acceptable lingua-franca. It is pertinent to define the key concepts “loaning” and “borrowing”. The word borrowing (according to Webster’s Dictionary) implies “taking something on the understanding that it will be returned later, whereas the same authority defines “loaning” of word as adopting a word from a foreign language and freely being used (Nwachukwu 1995). It may be assimilated in form, spelling and pronunciation to the borrowing language or they may retain the foreign spelling and pronunciation. The implication here is that the two concepts are mutually exclusive. Though a little relationship exists between them.

Williams (2000) looks at loaning of words as the increase in vocabulary of words in order to express new concepts and technical terms which have come into use. Inter-lingualism, as the case may be, exists between or in relationship to two or more languages.

For example, English language which is one of the most commonly used languages internationally in communication relies heavily for its vocabulary on Latin, French, Greek and Scandinavian languages. By the same token, the three major languages (Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba) compliment English in mass communication, education, politics, business and other forms of social interaction among several millions of people all over Nigeria.

In spite of the extensive use of these languages there is the need for an up-to-date and comprehensive vocabulary of loaned/borrowed words among the various languages, if one of them is to emerge as a lingua franca in Nigeria.

It should be recalled that the National Policy on Education (2004), entrenched the use of the three designated major Nigerian languages (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) in our institutions of learning. This, if fully implemented, will go a long way to ensure the emergence of an acceptable lingua franca in Nigeria. Though it sometimes sounds ridiculous to borrow words from other languages, in the alternative new words could be coined from the existing

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ones. However, it may be easier to borrow English words although a mixture of methods may be the best approach.

It is the intention of this paper to re-examine the peculiarities that exist among lexical items in various Nigerian Languages (majority and minority groups inclusive) and recommend approaches to interlingual loaning or borrowing of words.

2 | REVIEW OF SOME EXISTING WORKS:

The review of earlier works by Dumstan and Elizabeth (1969) has shown that the emergence of a lingua franca in Nigeria would enhance the making of decisions on language programs for the National Policy and the micro-planning level with classroom provision. This is indeed the intention of the National Policy on Education (2004); whose objectives and philosophy are derived from the larger national objectives.

It could be reiterated at this point that loaning of words is a necessity to bilingual education and emergence of a lingua franca in Nigeria. Nigerian languages and English are the means by which educational content and social attitudes and values are transmitted. This is to say that language of the home must be allowed to perform some educational functions. This is the rationale of mother tongue medium (Bamgbose 1999). In this case the issues of emergence of a lingua-franca for the Nigerian languages could be mainly from the linguistic angle: the National Language Center could produce a checklist for institutions of learning technical terminologies for the Nigerian languages and meta languages, wordlist, glossaries and dictionaries.

Crystal (2000) indicated that the checklist on English has been a “ready reckoner” for the teacher in the language class of first to fourth years of primary schooling; since it is intended to ensure that language items necessary for the understanding in later years of other school subjects have been taught. Such initiatives can also aid the production of a guide to the teachers of the Nigeria languages which is aimed at responding to the class relationship between thought development and language on the one hand, and acquisition of knowledge and language competence on the other.

The emergence of a lingua franca from the Nigerian languages is often conceived in terms of facilitating communication links between diverse groups, mainly from different ethnic groups. Right from the colonial period, education has played a major role in this effort; the European medium of education which was also the official language is considered the suitable instrument for integration. Commenting on the role of official languages Emeir (2003) says, “it is doubtful whether a European language is likely to become the most efficient nation building instrument in many African States”. This suggests that Nigerian languages could come up with an acceptable orthography that has general mutual intelligibility.

According to Afolayan (1991) it is sometimes felt that Nigerian languages should not borrow words either from other Nigerian languages or from English. Sometimes, indeed it is not necessary to borrow or loan. It is at times possible to coin new words from the existing words. In other cases, however, it may be easier to borrow from English words. This then suggests that borrowing or loaning could also exist among the immediate speech community at the ethnic level.

Commenting on the need for a lingua franca, Crystal (2000) lamented that “a nation which conducts its affairs in a foreign language cannot claim to be free because linguistic slavery is worse than political domination. Fakuade (1989) adds that if this repressed linguistic bias could be displayed towards Hausa, the reaction of the same people towards the teaching and learning of Igbo and Yoruba might be the same.

In summarizing these opinions, it seems established that loaning or borrowing has been existing among foreign languages which led to the development and emergence of their lingua-franca. If that is the case, it is possible for words in different Nigerian languages to be coined to emerge as a lingua-franca.

3 | VIABILITY OF NIGERIAN LANGUAGES

The perpetuation of human language depends upon our human prosperity to imitate within or outside the immediate language community. It is imitation that makes it possible for patterns of one language to be

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borrowed or loaned into another. And indeed whenever two languages come into contact, words, less frequently sounds and occasionally even some grammatical patterns manage to filter across from one language to the other.

Since two or more languages rarely meet on equal terms, the languages can be expected to undergo different influences while many other variables can complicate the situation, the subordinate language is the one more likely to be influenced. Native speakers of the dominant language may resist the incorporation of the features that are derived from what they may regard as an inferior source. As bilingualism is often common among speakers of a subordinate language, their loaning or borrowing can be relatively free since foreign items have a good chance of being understood.

In the light of the above discussion, it is necessary to discuss some of these areas where various languages have loaned or borrowed outside their own language community and see the need to incorporate them together for the possible emergence of a lingua-franca. This could either be in form of lexical, phonological or grammatical loaning or borrowing. The chart below may give an insight into some peculiarities that exist among these languages whereas English stands as a universal language to all.

Positive Implications Of Borrowing

According to Nnebedum et Al (2018), outright borrowing is a type of interlingual borrowing that has positive implications to the donor language. It involves complete and total borrowing of an item. In this type of borrowing, the phonetic, phonological, morphological and syntactic rule of the source language is adopted and respected. Some examples of outright borrowed words in Igbo are;

English	Igbo	Hausa	Yoruba
Motor	Moitol Mota	Moitol	Teibuì/taìbili
Table	Teibuùl	Tebur	Kaìbureitoì
Carburetor	Kaìbureitl	Kabureta	Kaìleindaì
Calendar	KaìlÈndaì	Kalanda	Eiditoì
Editor	Eidití	Edita	Einjiìn
Engine	iinliìn	Injin	Kaìnin-kaìnin
Sponge	Soìsoi	Soso	Baìbai
Father	Paìpai	Baba	Mìsalasi
Mosque	àilíàikaì	Masalaci	Ailaàfiài
Health	Aìhùiike	Lafia	Keìkei
Bicycle	Iìgweì	Keke	Maailuì
Cow	Naimaì	Saniya	Aìluboisaì
Onion	Aìlboisaì	Albasa	Sìilsìl
Six pence	Sìisìl	Sisi	Sìileì
Ten pence	Shiileì	Sule	Toiroì
Three pence	Tìrìfì	Toro	Waìyoi
Clever	Waìyoi	Wayo	Aìkamu/.ko
Pap	Aìkaìmàì	Akamu	

Fig. 1:

From the chart one could see that among the three Nigerian languages (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba), there exist some similarities in their spellings, pronunciation and meaning such as

Engine	iinliìn	Injin	Einjiìn
Motor	Moitol	Mota	Moitol
Cow	Naimaì	Saniya	Maailuì
Six pence	Sìisìl	Sisi	Sìilsìl
Clever	Waìyoi	Wayo	Waìyoi
Pap	Aìkaìmàì	Akamu	Aìkamu/.ko
Three pence	Tìrìfì	Toro	Toiroì

Fig. 2:

From the above samples of similarities, though with some phonological variations, it is pertinent therefore to absorb one each as a standard orthography for Nigerian languages.

There is also lexical variations from one of the languages such as:

Sponge	Soìsoi	Soso	Kaìnin-kaìnin
Father	Paìpai	Baba	Baìbai
Health	Aìhùiike	Lafia	Ailaàfiài
Bicycle	Iìgweì	Keke	Keìkei

Fig. 3:

From the above variations, for a word to be accepted generally, at objective level, the ones that appear most frequent than the others should be adopted.

This is because the less appeared has been assimilated. These peculiarities could either be through phonological, tonological or lexical variations.

4 | CONCLUSIONS

The resolution of this issue, without a doubt, might seem complex to most elites. But what one should always bear in mind is that Rome was not built in a day. It is therefore the opinion of this writer that all hands should be on deck to see to the possibility of realizing this goal.

However, for the desired goal of emergence of a lingua franca for the nation to be achieved, political, religious, ethnic and social linguistic differences should be discarded. The National Language Center or any other authority should be mandated to prepare some metalanguage, technical and scientific in their alphabets, I believe the complexity could be reduced.

Apparently, the details of emergence of lingua franca for Nigerian languages have been discussed only to a certain level and the points highlighted here are subject to further research. A thorough survey of the emergence of a lingua franca would require years of research. This paper pretends therefore to no such resplendent status.

In conclusion, borrowing as a socio-linguistic process should be accepted by all languages and communities. However, intra-lingual borrowing should be encouraged more, this borrowing within the very language dialect but when there are no other equivalents in the said language and its dialect, that is where and when inter-lingual borrowing comes in. This is because some countries like French which attempted to keep their language pure by prohibiting borrowing, failed automatically. This shows that even the laws cannot stop linguistics borrowing. Again, more researches should be carried out so as to find out the best ways words can be borrowed without any negative implications to both the donor and recipient language.

5 | RECOMMENDATIONS

It is without a doubt that an issue like this might be complex but it is believed that where there is no problem, it is difficult to come to a solution. In the light of that, the following recommendations are made:

[noitemsep,nolistsep,topsep=5pt]The variation between the dialects of the various languages may constitute a problem but could be taken care of by educating the subject on the need for standardization. There may likely be monopolistic occurrences of a particular language community. There may be a problem of vocabulary selection since it is clearly impossible to pay equal attention to both languages, it is then necessary to accommodate those words that cut across the confines of linguistic intelligibility. The problem of manpower for such a big task could be a problem since there might likely be an interference as a result of lack of competence to resolve this. Government's attention is therefore needed for the training of skillful manpower.

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