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Language Contact and Lexical Change: A Case Study of English Borrowings in The Igala Language

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Abstract

This study examines the phenomenon of lexical borrowing from English into the Igala languages and its contribution to enriching vocabulary. Lexical borrowing is a linguistic phenomenon where one language adopts words from a donor language and incorporates them into the vocabulary of a receptor language. This usually occurs when speakers of one language encounter new concepts, technologies, or cultural elements from another language and import the corresponding words to express these concepts in their language. The research aim is to investigate how Igala speakers incorporate English words into their daily interactions as borrowed words. The study is a quantitative and qualitative descriptive analysis. A total of 30 respondents who are native speakers of the language from Dekina Local Government were interviewed and examined for their language use through observations. The analysis reveals that Igala speakers predominantly use their language. However, English lexical items that do not have their equivalent in the language were adapted phonologically and morphologically and incorporated into the language to fill lexical gaps.

Keywords: Lexical borrowing, Language contact, Igala Language, English Loanwords, Loanwords in Igala.

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INTRODUCTION

Language is often defined as "a structured system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which members of a speech community communicate" (Bloch, Trager, & Hodge, 1942). Bolinger (2007) offers a more nuanced interpretation, describing language as "a system of vocal-auditory communication, using conventional signs composed of arbitrary patterned sound units, and assembled according to set rules, interacting with the experiences of its users." These definitions emphasize the dynamic nature of language, serving not only as a tool for communication but as a constantly evolving system that responds to various external influences, including cultural interactions, historical contexts, and globalization.

In its role as a medium of communication, language provides users with an array of options designed to meet the needs of various contexts. As such, language is an adaptive entity, shaped by numerous factors, including contact with other languages. One

significant outcome of such contact is lexical borrowing, a process by which one language adopts words and phrases from another. This process occurs for a variety of reasons, particularly when two languages come into contact, whether through physical interaction (e.g., English and Hausa), written communication (e.g., English and Latin), or when new concepts emerge that the borrowing language does not have a pre-existing term for (Owolabi& Dada, 2011). As Owolabi and Dada (2011) assert, "languages borrow freely from one another," suggesting that this phenomenon is not only common but an inherent part of linguistic evolution.

The Igala language, spoken by the Igala people in Nigeria, provides a prime example of the impact of lexical borrowing. With the increasing global dominance of the English language, many indigenous languages, including Igala, have experienced a rise in the incorporation of English loanwords (Edimeh, 2006). This borrowing reflects the broader linguistic shifts resulting from globalization and the spread of English as a dominant medium of communication. While the integration of new terms can enhance the expressiveness and versatility of a language, it also raises concerns regarding the preservation of indigenous linguistic and cultural identity.

The effects of lexical borrowing in the Igala language are twofold. On the one hand, borrowing from English introduces new concepts, particularly in domains such as technology, education, and global communication, where Igala previously lacked corresponding terms. This can expand the vocabulary of Igala, enabling speakers to more effectively navigate modern, globalized contexts. On the other hand, there is an inherent risk of cultural and linguistic dilution. As English loanwords become more prevalent, they may displace traditional Igala expressions, potentially eroding aspects of Igala identity that are deeply intertwined with its language (Unubi& Bello, 2017). The introduction of English loanwords thus has implications not only for the structure of the Igala language but also for the broader cultural landscape, which is inseparable from its linguistic forms.

Languages are constantly evolving systems, influenced by the societies that use them. It is widely acknowledged that when two or more speech communities come into contact, there is a natural tendency for their languages to influence one another (Unubi& Yusuf, 2019). Such interactions often result in the borrowing of lexical items, a process that is a hallmark of language contact. According to Crystal (1997), borrowing occurs when a word of extraneous origin is incorporated into a language, thus becoming a 'loanword.' This dynamic highlights how languages not only reflect but also adapt to the cultural and social contexts in which they exist.

The influence of English on Igala, particularly in terms of lexical borrowing, raises critical questions about the future of the language. As English continues to dominate as the medium of instruction and as the official language in Nigeria, the Igala language, like many other indigenous languages, faces the challenge of balancing modernity and tradition. The question remains whether the influx of English loanwords will result in the preservation of Igala's unique cultural identity or whether it will contribute to the gradual erosion of its linguistic distinctiveness. Therefore, examining the extent and patterns of English influence on Igala, particularly through lexical borrowing, is vital to

understanding the broader implications for language preservation and cultural sustainability in the face of globalization.

METHOD

The data were collected through observation and interview and further subjected to thorough analysis. Based on the nature of the data generated from the observation and interview, the numerical aspects of the data gathered were analyzed using range, frequency, and percentage. In contrast, the data obtained from the interview will be analyzed narratively. The data will be transcribed and analyzed descriptively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data Presentation and Analysis

Bio Data and Education Qualifications of the Respondents

Tables one to three represent the biodata of the respondents as well as their educational qualifications.

Table 1.

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	15	50%
Female	15	50%
Total	30	100%

Source: Oral Interview

Table 2

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage %
40-59	10	40%
60 and above	20	60%
Total	30	100%

Source: Oral Interview

Regarding the age group of the respondents, the table shows that 10 (40%) of the respondents are between the ages of 40 and 59, while 20 (60%) are between the ages of 60 and above.

Table 3.

Qualifications	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Educated	25	85%
Non-Educated	5	15%
Total	30	100%

Source: Oral Interview

The table reveals that 25 (85%) of the respondents are educated, and 5 (15%) are non-educated.

Data on the Lexical Borrowing

The table below presents some English words borrowed into Igala from different aspects of human endeavour from the thirty (30) respondents through interviews and observations.

Table 4.

Data Related to Igala and Commerce

ENGLISH	IGALA
Bank	Ibaki
Counter	Ikata
Accountant	Akatati
Manager	Imaneja
Company	Ikopeni

Source: Observation

The table above shows that suffixation has enriched the Igala language. For example, "Bank" is a word that originated from the English language. However, when the Igala language borrows it, it goes with some modifications and changes to "ibaki" with a prefix attached to it. All other words in the table, 'counter, accountant, manager, and company', have also been borrowed directly, modifying suffixes, infixes, and prefixes.

Source: Observations**.**

Other English Words Incorporated into Igala Vocabulary:

1. Fridge - Igala: “Ifirigi”
2. Computer - Igala: “Ik**Ọ**puta”
3. Radio - Igala: **“**Irediyo**"**
4. School- Igala: “Ichekwulu”
5. Engine- Igala: “Ejini”
6. Hospital - Igala: “Achibiti”
7. Cement- Igala: “Isẹmẹti”
8. Wardrobe- Igala: “Iw**Ọ**duropu”
9. Office - Igala: “Ofisi”
10. Chair - Igala: “Ichiya”
11. Table - Igala: “Itebulu”
12. Zip – Igala: “Izipu”
13. Bench - Igala: “Ibẹchi”
14. Church -Igala: “Ich**Ọ**chi”
15. Torch – Igala: “It**Ọ**chi"

Data Analysis

(1) The English word **'Fridge'** becomes **'Ifirigi'** when borrowed into Igala language; there is a substitution of the /e/ with/i/. The vowel /i/ is produced at the front of the tongue with the lips slightly spread. It is described as low, front tense. This sound occurs freely in word-initial, medial, and final positions. It is, however, articulated as low front lax [ɪ] in Igala language. The [ɪ] being produced by speakers of the Igala language is a short vowel which is articulated with the mouth half closed. In Igala language,

consonant clusters are not permitted. Hence, as demonstrated in the example above, when incorporating English words into Igala containing multiple consonants in the same position, they are typically replaced with vowels. Furthermore, it is a common rule in the Igala language for words to begin and end with a vowel, as in /f/ becomes / Ifi/.

(2). The English word **'Computer'** becomes **'IkQputa'** when borrowed into the Igala language; the consonants are substituted with vowel /I/ and /a/. The vowels are pronounced with lips rounding, which is in a neutral, relaxed position, which will be pronounced as "ee-koh-PUH-tah". Also, the consonant cluster in the English word "computer" is replaced by the vowel /O/ when pronounced in Igala. Following the rules of Igala grammar, the word begins and ends with a vowel in its spelling.

(3). The English word **"Radio"** becomes **"Irediyo"** when borrowed into Igala vocabulary; there is also substitution of the consonant with a vowel, and the Igala word starts with a vowel and ends also with a vowel /I/ and /o/. It can be pronounced as "ee-reh-dee-yoh," emphasizing the "dee" part and the vowel pronounced as described.

(4). When borrowed into the Igala language, the English word **'School'** becomes **'Ichekwulu'**; the consonants in the English word are substituted with vowels /I/ and /u/ to be adopted in the Igala language.

"I" is pronounced as the Igala short, high-front, unrounded vowel, similar to the "ee" sound in the English word "see."

"Che" is pronounced with a voiceless postalveolar fricative sound, similar to the "ch" in the English word "cheese."

"kwu" is pronounced with the "kw" sound, which is a voiceless labialized velar plosive, followed by the short Igala vowel /u/, similar to the "qu" in the English word "quick."

"lu" is pronounced with a short "u" sound, as in the Igala vowel /u/.

So, "ichekwulu" would be something like "ee-chay-kwuh-loo". In Igala, the absence of the "sc" sound leads to its replacement with the "ch" sound in pronunciation. For example, "school" is pronounced as "Ichekwulu" as transcribed above.

(5). When borrowed into Igala vocabulary, the English word **'Engine'** becomes **'Ejini'**; the consonant is substituted with a vowel /i/.

" E" is pronounced as a short, high front unrounded vowel, similar to the "e" sound in the English word "bet."

"Ji" is pronounced with a voiceless postalveolar fricative sound, similar to the "j" in the English word "jeep," followed by a short, high front unrounded vowel, similar to the "ee" sound in "see."

"Ni" is pronounced with a short, high front unrounded vowel, similar to the "ee" sound in "see." So, "Ejini" would be something like "eh-jee-nee. In Igala language, words like "engine" starting and ending with vowels result in the replacement of the initial "e" sound and nasal "n" sound with a vowel. This substitution occurs because Igala vocabulary restricts consecutive consonants in the same position.

(6). The English word **'Hospital'** becomes **'Achibiti'** by replacing the consonants with vowels /a/ and /i/

"A" is pronounced as a short, open central unrounded vowel, similar to the "a" sound in the English word "father."

"Chi" is pronounced with a voiceless postalveolar fricative sound, similar to the "ch" in the English word "cheese."

"bi" is pronounced with a voiced bilabial fricative sound, similar to the "b" in the English word "baby," followed by a short, high front unrounded vowel, similar to the "ee" sound in "see."

"ti" is pronounced with a voiceless postalveolar fricative sound, similar to the "t" in the English word "tea," followed by a short, high front unrounded vowel, similar to the "ee" sound in "see."

So, "Achibiti" would be something like "ah-chee-bee-tee",

(7). The English word **'Cement'** becomes **'Isemeti'** by replacing the consonants with the vowel /i/.

"i" is pronounced as a short, high-front, unrounded vowel, similar to the "ee" sound in the English word "see."

"se" is pronounced with a voiceless postalveolar fricative sound, similar to the "s" in the English word "see," followed by a short, high front unrounded vowel, similar to the "ee" sound in "see."

"me" is pronounced with a voiced bilabial fricative sound, similar to the "m" in the English word "mother," followed by a short, high front unrounded vowel, similar to the "ee" sound in "see."

"ti" is pronounced with a voiceless postalveolar fricative sound, similar to the "t" in the English word "tea," followed by a short, high front unrounded vowel, similar to the "ee" sound in "see."

So, "isemeti" would be something like "ee-say-may-tee." In Igala pronunciation, the absence of the "c" sound leads to its replacement with "s," thus making "cement" pronounced as "isemeti." At times, words with "c" are usually substituted with "ch," and emphasis is placed on the "ch" sound, resulting in "ichemeti."

(8) The English word **'Wardrobe'** becomes **'IwỌduropu**' by replacing the consonants with vowels /i/ and /u/

"i" is pronounced as a short, high-front, unrounded vowel, similar to the "ee" sound in the English word "see."

"Wo" is pronounced with a short, high, back-rounded vowel, similar to the "o" sound in the English word "go."

"Du" is pronounced with a voiced alveolar tap or flap sound, similar to the "d" sound in the Spanish word "adiós."

"Ro" is pronounced with a rolled or trilled "r" sound, if applicable in the specific Igala dialect, followed by the short, high back rounded vowel "o."

"pu" is pronounced with a voiceless bilabial fricative sound, similar to the "p" sound in the English word "pop," followed by the short, high back rounded vowel "u."

So, "iwoduropu" would be something like "ee-woh-doo-raw-poo". In Igala, the consonant cluster "dr" in the word "wardrobe" is substituted with the "du" sound. This replacement occurs because Igala vocabulary avoids repeated consonants in the same position, replacing the "r" sound with the vowel "u."

(9). The English word **'Office'** becomes **'Ofisi**' by replacing the consonant with the vowels /i/

"o" is pronounced as a close-mid back rounded vowel, similar to the "o" sound in the English word "go."

"Fi" is pronounced with a voiceless labiodental fricative sound, similar to the "f" in the English word "office," followed by a short, high front unrounded vowel, similar to the "ee" sound in "see."

"Si" is pronounced with a voiceless postalveolar fricative sound, similar to the "s" in the English word "see," followed by a short, high front unrounded vowel, similar to the "ee" sound in "see."

So, "ofisi" would be something like "oh-fee-see"

(10). The English word **'Chair'** becomes **'Ichiya**' by replacing the consonants with vowels /i/ and /a/

"i" is pronounced as a short, high-front, unrounded vowel, similar to the "ee" sound in the English word "see."

"Chi" is pronounced with a voiceless postalveolar fricative sound, similar to the "ch" in the English word "cheese."

"ya" is pronounced with a short, high front unrounded vowel, similar to the "ee" sound in "see," followed by a glottal stop sound, which is a brief interruption in airflow made by closing the back of the vocal cords. In Igala, the consonant cluster in the English word "chair" is replaced with vowels, as the word structure requires it to begin and end with vowels.

So, "ichiya" would be something like "ee-chee-ya.

(11). The English word **'Table'** becomes **'Itebulu**' by replacing the consonants with the vowel /u/.

"te" is pronounced with a voiceless postalveolar fricative sound, similar to the "t" in the English word "tea," followed by a short, high front unrounded vowel, similar to the "ee" sound in "see."

"bu" is pronounced with a voiced bilabial fricative sound, similar to the "b" in the English word "baby," followed by a short, high back rounded vowel, similar to the "oo" sound in "food."

So, "tebulu" would be something like "tay-boo-loo,"

The word "table" undergoes a structural change and becomes "tebulu" when adopted in the Igala language.

The word "table" undergoes a structural change and becomes "tebulu" when adopted in the Igala language.

In the English word "table", there are no consonant clusters. A consonant cluster is a sequence of two or more consonant sounds occurring together without any vowels

between them. In "Table" each consonant is followed by a vowel, and there are no consecutive consonants without vowels between them. Therefore, this word does not contain any consonant clusters.

(12). The English word **'Zip'** becomes **'Izipu**' by replacing the consonants with vowels /i/ and /u/

"i" is pronounced as a short, high front unrounded vowel, similar to the "ee" sound in the English word "see."

"zi" is pronounced with a voiced alveolar fricative sound, similar to the "z" in the English word "zebra," followed by a short, high front unrounded vowel, similar to the "ee" sound in "see."

"Pu" is pronounced with a voiceless bilabial fricative sound, similar to the "p" sound in the English word "pop," followed by a short, high, back-rounded vowel, similar to the "oo" sound in "food."

So, "izipu" would be something like "ee-zee-poo,"

In the English word "zip", there are no consonant clusters. A consonant cluster is a sequence of two or more consonant sounds occurring together without any vowels between them. In the word "zip", the consonant is followed by a single vowel between them. Therefore, this word does not contain any consonant clusters.

(13) The English word **'Bench'** becomes **'Ibechi**' by replacing the consonants with the vowel /i/

"i" is pronounced as a short, high front unrounded vowel, similar to the "ee" sound in the English word "see."

"Be" is pronounced with a voiced bilabial fricative sound, similar to the "b" in the English word "baby," followed by a short, high front unrounded vowel, similar to the "ee" sound in "see."

"chi" is pronounced with a voiceless postalveolar fricative sound, similar to the "ch" in the English word "cheese," followed by a short, high front unrounded vowel, similar to the "ee" sound in "see. on"

So, "ibechi" would be something like "ee-bay-chee,",

(14) The English word **'Church'** becomes **'IchOchi**' by replacing the consonants with the vowel /I/

"I" is pronounced as a short, high front unrounded vowel, similar to the "ee" sound in the English word "see."

"Cho" is pronounced with a voiceless postalveolar fricative sound, similar to the "ch" in the English word "cheese," followed by a short, high-back rounded vowel, similar to the "oo" sound in "food."

"Chi" is pronounced with a voiceless postalveolar fricative sound, similar to the "ch" in the English word "cheese," followed by a short, high-front unrounded vowel, similar to the "ee" sound in "see."

So, "ichochi" would be something like "ee-choh-chee," though in some cases, words with 'ch' sound permit to some extent the use of a consonant cluster if used in Igala vocabulary as seen above.

(15) The English word **'Torch'** becomes **'ItOchi**' by replacing the consonants with the vowel /i/

"I" is pronounced as a short, high front unrounded vowel, similar to the "ee" sound in the English word "see."

"To" is pronounced with a voiceless alveolar plosive sound, similar to the "t" in the English word "top," followed by a short, high back rounded vowel, similar to the "oo" sound in "food."

"Chi" is pronounced with a voiceless postalveolar fricative sound, similar to the "ch" in the English word "cheese," followed by a short, high-front unrounded vowel, similar to the "ee" sound in "see."

So, "itochi" would be something like "ee-toh-Chee,"

In this long essay titled "The Influence of English Language on Igala Language: A Case Study of Lexical Borrowing", borrowing is a means through which language develops its lexical items, morphology, phonology, Syntax, and semantics. English, for example, is not what it is because of immense borrowing from other languages such as Latin, Greek, Roman, Arabic, and French. It would not have been where it is today. This is the case with the Igala language and many other world languages. The study shows that the Igala language has borrowed many words from the English language. Hence, the significant findings of the research could be summarized in the following:

- Most loan words from English to Igala result from indirect borrowing. Some were due to direct borrowing and were said to be the 21st-century newly invented words, such as computer, etc.

Discussion

(1). Consonant Cluster: In linguistics, a consonant cluster, also known as a consonant compound, refers to a sequence of consonants without any intervening vowel. This phenomenon is common in English. However, an adaptation process occurs when English words are integrated into the Igala language. Words with consonant clusters are modified in Igala, typically by inserting a vowel. Essentially, consonant clusters are mostly avoided in Igala, except for words containing the "ch" sound, for which a vowel cannot replace.

(2) Occurrence of vowels and consonants: In the Igala vocabulary, a notable pattern observed is that English words integrated into the language often begin and end with a vowel, as indicated in the analysis. According to Igala's grammatical rules, a word should not start or end with a consonant, both in phonetics and orthography.

(3) The Adaptation Process: According to the adaptation theory, when English words are incorporated into the Igala language to enhance communication, they undergo a process to align with Igala's grammatical rules, including structure, pronunciation, and spelling. However, the semantic meaning of these words remains unchanged, as their purpose is to fill lexical gaps in the Igala language. This adaptation results in the English words becoming integrated into the local dialect while retaining their original meanings.

CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of borrowing, particularly in the context of languages worldwide, is widespread. Lexical borrowing, in particular, involves the integration of English words into the vocabularies of various languages, thereby enhancing their linguistic richness, particularly for languages with limited lexicons. This process facilitates cross-linguistic communication and underscores the pervasive influence of the English language on a global scale. Instead of crafting new words to suit their linguistic needs, many languages incorporate English terms, thus solidifying English's dominance to a certain degree within the linguistic landscape.

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