ALÓRE

VOL.31, 2022

ILORIN JOURNAL OF THE HUMANITIES

ISSN: 0794-4551

ALÓRE

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Vol. 31, 2022

ISSN 0794-4551

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LANGUAGE CONTACT AND NEOLOGISM: A CASE STUDY OF IGBO LEXICAL SYSTEM

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Abstract

Language lives and grows and is maintained by the owners. Developments in all facets of life are accommodated in languages by loan mechanisms, new word creations or any other of the morphological processes of increasing the word-stock of languages. Neologism is one of the ways of keeping a language alive; accommodating changes and sustaining its dynamic nature. The use of neologism broadens the inclusive ownership of language to the youths. The theory of lexical morphology was used to analyze the Igbo neologisms. Data for the study were collected from a sample of one hundred and fifty respondents in five cities from three of the Igbo states of southeast, Nigeria. The result revealed that neologism is active in Igbo language and that it makes use of the normal morphological processes. The youth culture in cliques, music, habits, drug use and group effects have impacts on creating neologisms in Igbo language. The study of neologism should be a continuous exercise to record the entrance of new concepts or change in meaning of old words and to give a sense of worth that authentic and creative language use is worth the while. Linguists should continuously study the various groups in a speech community in various contexts with the aim of documenting neologisms that arise in the language from time to time.

Keywords: Language contact, Linguistics, word-formation processes, borrowing, neologisms

Introduction

Human beings are the carriers of language. It is when human beings come together and interact that their language(s) also come into contact. There is no language contact without human contact. Language contact is a

situation where different languages and their speakers come in close contact and these different languages interact closely through their speakers. It goes beyond languages existing together in the same place, geographical zone or ecosphere. It is only when people come into contact that they share what they have in their languages and cultures positively or negatively. Language contact is a phenomenon whereby two or more distinct languages are spoken within a speech community and whenever two languages come in contact within an individual or a community such an individual or host community inevitably becomes bilingual (Crystal, 1997). Weinreich (1953) opines that two languages are said to be in contact if they are alternatively used by the same individual. This suggests a bilingual situation for the individual or for the community. This is specially so where the ethno-linguistic communities concerned exist peacefully with each other in the same geographical zone for a long time. Language contacts have in some times and places been short-lived, with language loss and assimilation a relatively short-term result, whereas other historical situations have produced relative long-term stability and acceptance by the bi- or multilingual population (Sorensen, 1967 and Sankoff, 1980). Language contact in turn gives birth to language convergence, borrowing and relexification.

Language(s) come into contact through colonization, conquest, trading, religion, cultural conflicts, migration, slavery, urbanization, marriages and tourism (Nnebedum, Onuora and Obiakor, 2018). English language came into Nigeria via colonialism and missionary activities. The British colonized Nigeria and bequeathed her language, the English language, to her by imposition. English rose to become the official language, the language of bureaucracy, administration, the court and the mass media. And this was despite there being over five hundred indigenous languages in Nigeria, a situation that has severely affected the vitality of the indigenous languages, their growth and development. The situation has resulted in inter-borrowings and various types of strata relationships. English language has had a devastating impact on many Nigerian languages to the extent of threatening their existence. Igbo language is one of the Nigerian languages that the "predator" is threatening to consume.

The British was not oblivious of the fact that Nigeria has so many indigenous languages when they introduced English to her. They intentionally introduced the octopus English to clear the waters for them to have a smooth sail in the administration of the land. The "vernaculars" were not expected to survive and there were no policy to nurture them nor were any function allocated to them. Both language and culture contact produce or

give birth to lexical innovation as by-product. The lexicon according to Mathiot (1967) as quoted by Acholonu, Penfield and Okezie (1980) is "the cultural system of reference to the various basic types of phenomena distinguished by the culture. Each time a new concept or phenomenon is delineated in the culture a new lexical innovation is required to capture it – either as a new term, old term with new meaning or old morpheme or lexemes in new terms. One way of achieving this is through loanwords. It is by that means that vocabulary of a language is extended. Loan words are words taken into a language from another language. The process of doing so is what is referred to as borrowing. Borrowing occurs when new things come into individuals' experiences as a result of having contact with users of other languages. Loanwords heighten a language's lexical stock and increase the flexibility of the language.

Every language, both indigenous and foreign, readily adapts to meet changes in their life and culture. The main impact of such changes is felt by the word stock or vocabulary of the language before it is felt by the grammatical and phonological structures of the language. Changes are felt more easily in word stock than in the other areas. And the leading cause of this sort of change is technology. Language users easily adapt new words, accept or invent new meanings for existing words, or cease to use some words or cease to use them with particular meanings. The umbrella term for those concepts is neologism. Neologism is a creative process of keeping pace with development. Niska (1998) sees neologisms as 'tokens of a creative process …growing out of the uniqueness of the individual on the one hand, and the materials, events, people, or circumstances of his life on the other'. Ezeifeka (2018, p.2) refers to neologisms as "nonce expressions invented on the spur of the moment to express a particular feeling or situation, but quite a number of them have persisted and have become neologisms". Neologisms give clues to the extent and level of development in a particular sphere of human endeavour or interaction. Yule (2010) sees neologism as a sign of a language's vitality and creativeness shaped by the need of the users. Neologisms are different from nonce expressions. Nonce expressions are linguistic forms invented accidentally or consciously to express a thought or an idea on just one single occasion (Nnebedum, Onuora & Obiakor, 2018; Crystal, 2007). However, some nonce words have been adopted by the speech community as stable neologisms. This study thus examines the concept of neologism among Igbo speakers.

The Igbo and their Language: Contact with other People and Culture

The name "Igbo" refers to both the people and their language. Igbo language is the most linguistically homogenous and populous ethnic group in the Southeast geopolitical zone in the present Nigerian state. They are the third most populous ethnic group in the country after Hausa and Yoruba. The language is one of the three major languages in Nigeria. Their population according to 2006 census figures stood at 40 million.

Tracing the history of the Igbo people is like contact tracing – investigating the people with whom they may have had contact with as a group. The oriental hypothesis of their origin sees the Igbo people and their culture as deriving from the orient, principally Egypt and Israel. Cultural resemblances between the Igbo and the Jews made the propagators of this hypothesis to believe that Igbo could have been one of the lost tribes of the biblical Israel. The Language family hypothesis with which Greenberg was very prominent believes that Igbo is a member of the Kwa sub-family of Niger-Congo family of African languages (Greenberg, 1963). It is believed that the origin of the Niger-Congo language family lies near Lake Chad. In another account of the language family hypothesis, Seligman (1957) employs racial criteria to fit the Igbo along with the Nupe and the Ibibio into the Ewe cluster while Herskovits (1962) includes them in the Guinea Coast group. The tracing of the history by this means has not generated a generally acceptable account of the origin of the people.

It is good to note that Igbo had a writing system known as Nsibidi or Nsibiri before they came into contact with the missionaries. The contact with the missionaries resulted in the non-development of the early Igbo writing system. Nsibidi was used for record keeping, warning against danger or for public information. According to Nwabara (1982), the writing material consisted of the ground, the wall, calabashes, and clothes and the writing instruments included a stick with sharpened ends, chalk, charcoal, carving knives, raffia palm thread and bamboo needle. The Nsibidi system, though not developed, served the purpose of encouraging the education of the "elite of the society in the language and higher culture of the land" (Ogbalu and Emenanjo, 1975, p.74). The Nsibidi system, according to Nwabara (1982) might have developed but for the imposition of the English alphabet so soon as contact was established with the Christian missionaries in mid-nineteenth century.

The English language was introduced by the British and English-speaking missionaries to Southern part of Nigeria from about 1842 (Igboanusi, 2003). The missions were interested in developing and learning

the indigenous languages of the people or train local people in English. The people themselves demanded education in English language which was seen as the language of commerce and civilization, and the road to success, advancement and emancipation. The first missionary to express interest in learning Igbo was Rev J. F. Schon. Samuel Crowther later took over the responsibility of studying the Igbo language when Schon concentrated his efforts on Hausa. Rev J. C. Taylor later took over the study of Igbo from Crowther in 1857. Rev Taylor was an Igbo ex-slave who was later discouraged in his determination and work on Igbo by the problem of dialectal variation in Igbo following his Isuama experience. The planned and coordinated efforts of the British in planting their language in Nigeria has been picturesquely captured by Igboanusi (2003, p.102) in the following words:

> Trade relations and missionary activities could be said to have been the remote cause of the implantation of English in Nigeria by providing opportunities for early contact between the Europeans and the Africans. But the most important factor in the implantation of English in the country is colonization. By the beginning of the 20th century, the colonial administration had been effectively established in many African states. The colonizers imposed their system of government on the indigenous people of Nigeria and expectedly, the language of the colonial administration. The acceptance of the British leadership also meant the acceptance of the English language.

When the British applied their colonial system of administration of indirect rule, the system went through successfully in Hausa land and Yoruba land but had problems in Igbo land. The Hausa land and the Yoruba land had a system of monarchical institutions of Emirs and Obas that was related and amenable to the indirect rule system. In Igbo land such a system was lacking. There was no unified system of government in Igbo land. The Igbo people were highly republican and their government was fragmentary. As a solution to this challenge the British selected some of their frontline workers and appointed them warrant chiefs to represent their designated communities. The Igbo people resisted and fought against the imposition though eventually with very unsavory consequences on both sides. The British also recruited individuals who had some Western education and could understand the English language to serve them as interpreters and clerks in offices.

The Igbo people rushed to learn and use English language. And the rush for English education was eventually cataclysmic to the people and their own language as noted by Igboanusi (2003, p.104):

> Engrossed in the excitement of Western education and its gains, many of these Igbo people relegated their language and culture to the background, and even developed some resentment for the study of Igbo language in schools. The direct consequence of this action was the proliferation of literature written in English in the late 1950s and 1960s. This era marked the beginning for the emergence of such Igbo writers like Cyprain Ekwensi, Chinua Achebe, Flora Nwapa, etc.

Neologism

There are intensive developments and changes in the social, political, religious and scientific spheres of human life throughout the world today. These developments and changes bring about corresponding developments and changes in the lexicological layer of languages. The development in the lexicological layer seems to be imperceptible and slow to the ordinary person but surely takes place. The languages need to enlarge its coast through lexical enrichment and enlargement to accommodate the developments. This is made possible by the appearance of new features and properties in languages to keep abreast with the social or political change, revolution or innovation. This is realized by the introduction of new words and terms in languages. The words and terms are initially perceived as unusual and new but with time they get assimilated into the languages' vocabulary. Neologism "is a word or phrase created for defining a new (unknown before) object or expressing a new notion''. Dictionary of Oxford languages (2021) defines it as a newly coined word or expression while Wikipedia (n.d.) says it ''is a relatively recent or isolated term, word, or phrase that may be in the process of entering common use, but that has not yet been fully accepted into mainstream language''. Newmark (1988) defines it as newly coined lexical units or existing lexical units that acquire a new meaning. Changes in culture and technological improvements are what spur neologisms. Neologisms may or may not live long. It is either they are accepted and taken into the lexicon of the language or cease to exist due to lack of use. A neologism can appear in one of the following forms: (i) a completely new word, (ii) a new combination of existing words, (iii) a new meaning for an existing word or (iv) an abbreviation or acronym.

It is important to note that there are very few new words that get into languages from time to time. Majority of the otherwise new words include lexical component which is already familiar to the language users and are formed through several linguistic morphological processes such as, compounding, blending, re-approximation, abbreviation or affixation. These above processes notwithstanding, the simplest used to create new words from other languages is borrowing. Neologisms pass through three stages: creation, trial and establishment. New words or concepts are assumed to be created when they come into being by first use. The trial period refers to the testing time for acceptance, spread and sustainability of the new concept or word. The final stage is the stage of community widespread acceptance and common usage. Rey (1995) according to Prabowo (2019), claims that neologism can be total as in the case of borrowings, or partial as in the case of affixation, composition, agglutination or very weak as in the case of acronyms and abbreviations. He identified nine types of neologisms which he listed as: old word with a new sense, new coinages, derived word, abbreviation/pseudo-neologism, collocation, eponyms, phrasal word, transferred word and acronyms.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework adopted for this work is the lexical morphology theory. Lexical morphology is a branch of morphology that deals with how words or lexemes are formed in languages. It is the collection of lexemes in a language. It deals with the composition and internal structure of words and the way that structure determines the word meaning, rather than the way they combine to make larger units like phrases and clauses. It deals with the formation of lexical bases.

There were two major approaches to morphology before now: the morpheme approach and the lexeme approach. In the morpheme tradition, Taft and Forster (1975) argue that listeners break words into their component morphemes for analysis, and that each morpheme is listed separately in the lexicon. For the lexeme school, Butterworth (1983) maintains that words are available for recognition in the lexicon with their morphology complete. In a more recent understanding, Jarmulowicz and Taran (2013, p.57) observe that "the morpheme-based view of morphology has been replaced by lexeme-based morphology and more recently by non-compositional theories that view morphology as an emergent structure.

Methodology

This is a survey study involving mainly the youths randomly but purposively selected to include those who are the drivers of neologisms in languages. This includes touts, regular travellers, musicians, music lovers, security agents and their friends. The data were collected through questionnaire and oral interview. One hundred copies of questionnaire were distributed and retrieved from young men and women in Onitsha, Awka, Nsukka, Enugu and Aba. A total of fifty people were interviewed. Infinix S4 was used for the recording. Additional information was collected through WhatsApp and SMS sent to people in those cities. The theory of lexical morphology was used to analyze the data. The results showed that the attested neologisms in Igbo followed the morphological processes of refashioning, clipping, and acronym.

Demographic Information

Table1: Distribution of the Respondents according to Age

Age Range	Population	Percentage
12 – 20 years	15	15%
21 – 40 years	65	65%
41 – 50 years	10	10%
50 years and above	10	10%

Table 1 shows that the majority of the respondents were between the age bracket of twenty one and forty years. The age group makes up the greatest population of the active group and the working class of any society.

Table 2: Distribution of the Respondents according to Sex

Sex	Number	Percentage
Male	60	60%
Female	40	40%

The male respondents were more than the female respondents by ratio of three to two. More male respondents contributed more neologism items in the areas of drug and fraud. This might not be unconnected with the fact that men are more daring than women generally in the society.

Table 3: Distribution of the Respondents according to the Level of Educational attainment

Educational Level	Number	Percentage
(a) Primary education	10	10%
(b) O'level W.A.S.C.	25	25%
(c) NCE/Diploma	40	40%
(d) HND/First Degree	20	20%
(e) M.A./M.SC. and Above	5	5%

Table 3 reveals that there was no illiterate in the sampled population and that respondents with NCE/Diploma constitute the majority of the sample. Respondents with primary education were only ten percent of the entire studied sample while those with the ordinary level certificate were twenty five percent. The least segment of the sample were those with master degree and above.

Table 4: Distribution of the Respondents according to Professions

a. Artisans/Touts/Motor Mates	30	30%
b. Business Men/Women	20	20%
c. Civil Servants	20	20%
d. Security Operatives	10	10%
e. Unemployed	20	20%

The majority of the respondents from table 4 are from the informal sector of the society, artisans, touts and motor mates. They accounted for thirty percent of the sampled population. The business men/women, civil servants and the unemployed were evenly distributed at twenty percent each. The least in the population were the security operatives who accounted for ten percent of the sampled population.

Analysis and Findings

Table 5: Neologisms in Concepts Associated with Drugs

Neologism	Literal translation	Meaning
1. Ḿkpụ́rụ́ ḿmīrī	Water flake	Hard drug
2. Ónyé áfịā/áhịā	Business person	Drug user
3. Mịchámịchá	Lick lick	A type of drug in form of sweet
4. Ǹtụ́	Ash	Drug/ cocaine
5. Áfịfịá	Grass	Weed/ hemp
6. Ịgbā ọ́gwụ̀	Taking injection	Smoking
7. Áfịá	Market	Hemp
8. Ńnụ̀nụ̀	Bird	(drug)Trafficker

Table 6: Neologisms Associated with Fraud

Neologism	Literal translation	Meaning
9. Ónyé ọ́rụ̄	Worker	A fraudster
10. Ịrụ̄ ọ̄rụ̄	Working	Fraud/ Advanced sea fraud
11. Ónyé Gìì	Guy	A fraudster
12. Íbūtē íké	Bringing strength	Making quick money
13. Álōbām̄	Colleague	Guy

Table 7: Neologisms for General Concepts

Neologism	Literal translation	Meaning
14. Íké	Strength	Power
15. Éké	Python	Police
16. Ónyéékē	Python Person	A policeman
17. Ńdíékē	Python People	Policemen
18. Ńwá	Child	Police
19. Ónyéńwā	A child	A policeman
20. Ónyéábá	Aba person	A military man
21. Sányà	Open eye	A thief
22. Gáyị	Guy	419
23. Ónyéímī	Nose person	Informant
24. Ịrụ̄kám̄	Labour	Working
25. Ígwè	Iron	Gun
26. Ụ́gbá	Fermented African oil bean seed	Case
27. Wáà	Escape	Run away
28. Kwéchírí	Stay	Insist/Resist

29. Òkpú	Cap	Condom
30. Kòró	Coro	Corona virus
31. Píípíí	Sound of a siren	Siren/ ambulance
32. Ógbè	Around	Neighbourhood
33. Kàsịtị	Tell	Expose
34. Óríńgó	Eating anyhow	Waywardness
35. Ọpàsà	It is everywhere	It is abundant
36. Gálīlī	Drinking spot	Bar
37. Ọgbà	Expo	Examination malpractice
38. Ńkụ́	Firewood	Excess money
39. Yáwáá	Disappointment	Problem
40. Kòríkòrí	Too much talk	Story/Problem
41. Lèbóò	Labourer	Husband
42. Akanelu	Hand up	Non stationary taxi/bus
43. Ị na-aga?	Are you going?	Commercial motorbike

Table 8: Neologisms in Personal names among the Igbo people

Neologism	Meaning
44. Ánịí (usually written Any)	Anayọ, Anụrịka
45. Ántō	Anthony
46. Ámịí (usually written as Amy)	Amaka, Amaechi, Amara
47. Ámbū	Ambrose
48. Bùbè	Ebube, Ọlụebube, Ebubechukwu
49. Chîî (written 'Chy')	Chinwe
50. Déràá	Chideraa
51. Ébìí (written 'Eby')	Ebere
52. Èdú	Chinedu
53. Émìí (written 'Emy')	Emeka
54. Ífîí (written 'Ify')	Ifeọma, Ifeeyinwa
55. Ḿmā	Chidịmma, Ekemma
56. Mésò	Mmesoọmachukwu
57. Óbịí (written Oby)	Ọbịanuju, Ọbịageri
58. Òkèé (written Okey)	Okechukwu
59. Ókwìí (written as Okwy)	Okwudiri, Okwuchukwu
60. Ọlịí (written as Oly)	Ọlụchukwu, Onyedịka
61. Ónyìí	Onyinye
62. Ósìí (written as Osy)	Osita
63. Úzọ̀	Ụzọamaka
64. Zúbì (written as Zuby)	Azụbụike
65. Zùrùòkè	Chukwuzuruoke

Table 9: Abbreviations in Personal names among the Igbo people

Neologism	Meaning
66. Ak (pronounced in English /eeke/)	Akachukwu
67. Az (pronounced /eezedi/)	Azụka
68. CJ (pronounced in English)	Chijioke
69. IK (pronounced in English /aịke/)	Ikechukwu, Ikenna, Ikemefuna
70. KC (pronounced in English /keesi/)	Kosisọchukwu, Kenechukwu
71. ND (pronounced in English)	Ndụbuisi, Ndụkwe, Nnamdị, Ndidi
72. NJ (pronounced in English)	Njideka
73. NK (pronounced in English)	Nkechi, Nkemdirim, Nkemakọlam
74. NG(pronounced in English)	Ngọzi
75. OD (pronounced in English)	Ọdịnaakachukwu
76. OZ (pronounced in English)	Ozịọma, Ọzọemena
77. UD (pronounced in English)	Udoka, Udobata
78. UJ (pronounced in English)	Ujunwa

Morphological Analysis

From the data in tables 5 and 6 it is clear that the morphological process most prominent in terms related to drugs is morphological extension. The concepts were not new in the language but the use to denote the concepts are. There was semantic extension of the original concepts to capture meanings. In the neologisms related to fraud, majority were old wine in new calabash also. Only "Álōbām̄" – Guy is a new coinage, first used by the musician ''Phyno'' in a musical concert.

The examples in table 7 showed the use of the morphological processes of conversion, new word creation, clipping and borrowing. The neologisms/ abbreviations in Personal names exhibited instances of clipping and mixed language forms. Some of the examples of the abbreviations ordinarily should be assumed to be in Igbo language but when uttered it is in English. The mixture is confusing and unfortunate but more worrisome is the fact that it points to a very serious language crisis – language death. A situation when a language is assumed to be written but is not spoken foretells danger of the time when that language would not be heard in people's mouth. In that condition the written form will only survive as relics of the erstwhile

language. The problems manifest in two different forms namely pronunciation and spelling.

Pronunciation of the Neologisms/ Abbreviations

Most Igbo abbreviations and clips are pronounced in English. Giving vent to Igbo abbreviations and clips in English is a dangerous signal towards the fall of the language or its demise. Language exists first in the spoken form and is usually sustained by use (speaking). If this dangerous trend is not controlled the future generation of Igbo people might not be able to recognize their language when written or spoken. This current trend will break the relationship between the spoken form of language and written form. This is one of the negative consequences of Igbo language contact with English. Today all two letter Igbo name abbreviations are false. They are English abbreviations of Igbo names and are usually pronounced in English. Language revitalization efforts should be intensified to use real Igbo short forms or abbreviations instead of the English forms. For instance, "Ngọọ" should be preferred to "NG" and "Ijee" should be used instead of "IJ" as the short forms of those names.

Spelling of the Neologisms/ Abbreviations

Igbo orthography is different from the English orthography though the two are written in the same script. The pronunciations of the words of each language follow the peculiar pattern of pronunciation in the language. The orthographic conventions are not obeyed in the writing of Igbo short forms/ neologisms especially by the youths. Spelling rules are very important in writing the language. It is inappropriate to write Igbo as if one is writing English. The instances of the confusion in the writing of Igbo concepts/ neologisms are very many in the examples presented in table 9 as in:

1. "OZ'' pronounced as /Oozɛdi/ instead of /Ózị́/
2. "ND" prounounced as /ɛndi/ instead of /Ńdụ̀/
3. ''NG'' pronounced as /ɛnʤi/ instead of /ŋ́gọ̀ọ̀/

It would be timely to checkmate the situation and teach the young ones what is appropriate.

Conclusion

Language contact proves to be at once a blessing and a misfortune. It is a blessing by providing concepts lacking in a particular language to it via borrowing and a misfortune because it, at times, makes the recipient

language lose what it has by copying another language as in spelling of Igbo concepts and items in English. The lexical stock of a language grows naturally to keep abreast with time and development. The Igbo lexicon has developed neologisms through outright formulation of new words, new coinages, semantic extension of meanings, clipping, abbreviation, etc. the neologisms have enriched the language greatly. They make the younger ones happy that they too can through ingenious creativity contribute to their language lexicon. However, there is the need to ensure that new items conform to the acceptable standard of the recipient language in spelling and pronunciation.

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