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English Loanwords as Lexical Enrichment to the Erei Language

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Abstract

Erei is a generic name for the language and people. It belongs to the Niger-Congo phylum of languages, and it is spoken predominantly by the Erei people in Biase Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. The paper examines English loanwords, particularly English nouns, as lexical enrichment to Erei. The study adopts Einar Haugen's (1950) Analysis of Linguistic Borrowing Model as the appropriate theoretical framework. This model is considered because it considers borrowings which are analyzable into word classes as a universal characteristic of languages. Data for the study were obtained using participant (speech) observation, direct interaction with Erei native speakers in their naturally occurring speech events, and other secondary sources. The findings reveal that Erei borrows massively from English lexicons, especially of the noun class (proper, countable, uncountable and collective nouns) which are influenced by the Christian religion, sociolinguistic and cultural, technological and phonological factors believed to facilitate the adoption, adaptation, modification and integration of the loans into the Erei vocabulary. There is the need, therefore, for the gradual development and review of Erei corpus to accommodate new developments.

Keywords: English loanwords, lexical enrichment, noun class, linguistic borrowing, Erei language.

1.0 Introduction

The sociolinguistic implication of prolonged language contact naturally breeds significant influence of one language on the other. This is even more so where one language appears to wield enormous communicative power and domains of use over and above the other. This is the case of English and Erei.

Erei represents the language and people. It is the indigenous language of 17 communities in Biase Local Government Area (LGA) of Cross River State, Nigeria. The communities are Abanwan, Afono, Edu, Ibini and Urugbam in Erei South Ward; Egbor, Etana, Ipene, Obum and Umuolor in Erei North Ward, and Abamba, Abapia, Abaribara,

Abredang, Abrijang, Ijom and Inuk in Abayong Ward. Erei, in terms of language family affiliation, belongs to a subgroup of Upper Cross River of the Benue Congo (Essien, 2003; Ugot, 2013).

The sociolinguistic landscape of Erei in consideration of her geographical location lends it to contact, develop affinity and borrow from the lexical items of neighbouring languages which include Efik, Igbo and English which is the official language of Nigeria (and the focus of this paper). Indigenous Nigerian languages (including Erei) have gradually established an essential affinity with the English language, which has resulted in the crossing of forms and elements; and blending of linguistic features through consistent ‘helpless’ borrowing.

Borrowing is a linguistic phenomenon that thrives in a multilingual setting, “especially where an indigenous language is confronted with another language that derives its legitimacy from recommendations by any of official, religious and commercial source” (Yusuf, 2018, p. 232). This is the case with indigenous Nigerian languages of which Erei is one, and their contact with the English language. Following the adoption of English as the official language in Nigeria and its earlier contact with Erei, English words have gradually, over time, gained admittance into, and usage in Erei, especially where there arise the communication need to describe alien concepts, ideas, notions or things which English represents. The English language came with the English culture and religion which in due course altered the sociocultural and ethnoreligious profile of the Erei people and her language.

As a result of the contact with English, new words have been generated into the existing Erei linguistic resources through the direct influence from Christianity, technology and civilization to enrich the lexical items of Erei. The lexicon of Erei is enriched by English loanwords which continue to emerge at every stage of the development of Erei language.

Therefore, this paper attempts to explore the English loans particularly the noun class and examine how they have adapted and integrated to conform with Erei linguistic inventory to bridge the communicative gap and attend to the communicative needs of the people. The paper limits itself to English nouns in Erei because of the perceived substantial borrowing of English words of all classes into Erei which is broad enough for further research.

2.0 Literature Review

According to Uwen and Ansa (2018), little has been done in terms of any ‘serious’ research on Erei language except that a few of its lexicon has been listed on studies on languages of Cross River State and those of the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. Aside from the dearth of research, the speakers are gradually being limited to its native speakers residing in the 17 communities and other neighbouring communities who appreciably

speak Erei. Also, linguists are yet to develop ‘meaningful’ interest in the development of the language. These factors underscore the endangered state of the language.

On the drought of pedagogic materials on Erei, Uwen (2018) claims that what could be considered as ‘serious’ research in Erei began in the 2000s with Inya’s (2011) pioneering work on the language. Inya foundational text: *How to read and write in Erei* attempts to develop elementary work on the grammar (subject to acceptable modifications) and also provides the basics for the development and description of the orthography. In the same vein, Ukam (2015) has examined the non-segmental features in spoken English among Erei-English bilinguals particularly in selected secondary school students of Erei extraction. The study identifies some aspects of transfer and interference from the mother tongue (MT) to the L₂ (English language) among Erei-English bilinguals. Also, the suprasegmental and intonational patterns in Erei have been discovered to differ from English, a condition that ultimately influences native speakers of Erei who learn and speak English as L₂ (Ukam, Uwen & Omale, 2017a; Ukam, Uwen & Omale, 2017b).

Also, Uwen and Ansa’s (2018) study on the pluralisation of nouns in Erei affirms that its plural formation takes the processes of replacement, zero morphs and suppletion. The supplemented forms in Erei are grammatically or lexically conditioned without any specific rule(s) in terms of their distribution, and the occurrence is contextually accidental. The study also reveals that Erei, like English, has singular and plural forms with striking differences in terms of the principles and parameters. Again, Uwen (2018) in a separate study on personal and possessive pronouns in Erei and English maintains that Erei, like English, has three grammatical persons: the first person, the second person and third person. Depending on the set of personal pronouns used by the speaker, the verbs, nouns and possessive relationships of the participants are frequently affected. The source avers that possessive pronouns in both languages also differ in terms of the slots per entry, their position within the sentence elements and the function they perform.

Despite these impressive insights into the Erei language, no research, to the best of our knowledge, has been carried out on loanwords in general and English loans in particular in Erei. Since it is a universal linguistic situation that every language is receptive of loanwords and consistency borrow from the lexicon of other languages to enrich its vocabulary, this study is therefore relevant. The study aims to examine English loanwords (particularly English nouns) borrowed, adapted and integrated into the linguistic configuration of Erei to enrich its lexical system and vocabulary.

3.0 Theoretical Background

The linguistic approach adopted for this study is Einar Haugen’s (1950) Analysis of Linguistic Borrowing Model which is a relevant reference point to the concept of borrowing. The model aims to precisely define the appropriate terminology used in linguistic analysis and to propose and adopt a unique hypothesis concerning the process of linguistic borrowing. Haugen maintains that all languages synchronically and

diachronically borrow to enrich their vocabularies and gradually attempt to ‘purify’ the recipient languages of foreign elements through adaption and integration. Therefore, the use of lexical forms from two languages is not a random and unintelligible mixing, rather, borrowing enables a speaker to switch for a word, phrase or sentence. This is done necessarily without the consent of the lending language or its native speakers who would by no means be repaid.

On linguistic borrowing, Kamwangamalu (1992) also avers that borrowing entails the adoption of the linguistic units of one language into the lexicon of the system of the other taking on its syntactic, phonological and morphological features. Such adoption and adaptation are often influenced by the linguistic pattern of the receiving language. Most loanwords “seemingly change the shape of foreign words to make them comply with the surface phonological structure of the borrowing language” (Peperkamp, 2004:349). As a universal sociolinguistic occurrence, English forms in Erei also appear to have been influenced partially or completely by the phonological patterns dominant in the repertoire of Erei native speakers. The surface phonological components of the loanwords are shaped to comply with those of Erei. The model is therefore relevant to this research.

4.0 Methodology

The data for this study were derived from primary and secondary sources. The primary sources were obtained through participant (speech) observation and direct interactions with segments of Erei native speakers in their unsolicited naturally occurring speech events within the native environment, some of whom are bilinguals. The bilinguals are believed to have more English loans than those residents permanently in the 17 communities and including them as the other sets of respondents was intended to complement the corpus generated by the first set interlocutors.

5.0 Data Presentation and Discussion

Data for discussion are derived from the administration of the techniques highlighted earlier. English loans and particularly those of the noun class were extracted from the generated corpus for discussion. This is arranged in the broad heading, English loans in Erei, and other subheadings, proper nouns, countable nouns, uncountable nouns, collective nouns and loans translations, and salient issues.

5.1 English Loanwords in Erei

The introduction and subsequent adoption of English as the official language in Nigeria have enormous impact and influence on the Nigerian indigenous languages in general, and Erei in particular. This is because the role the English language plays in the Nigerian multilingual landscape affords particularly Erei (and other Nigerian indigenous

languages) to borrow irresistibly from its lexicon to attend to and sustain emerging communication needs. In the case of Erei, English loans are influenced by Christianity, civilization and technology which came alongside the English language to Nigeria where indigenous languages got their share. Given the vast presence of English words across the parts of speech in Erei, the study has been limited to loans within the noun class.

5.1.1 Proper Nouns

Proper nouns are names of persons, places, towns, days of the week, months, among others. English names that Erei natives bear as is a result of Christianity which is the predominant religion in the area brought by the white missionaries. Although the names are Christian names originating from the implantation of the religion through the people's encounter with the early missionaries, they are striking differences at the level of pronunciation. The phonological variations occur through the processes of vowel insertion, assimilation, change in syllabic structure, tone and stress pattern. Such names realized through these processes include:

Sample A

English names	Erei version
'Patrick	Pa'triki
'James	'Jemisi
'Mary	Me'ri
'Edwin	Edu'win
'Thomas	To'mas
'Lawrence	Lo'rensi

5.1.2 Countable Nouns

In English, nouns are inflected to indicate the plural form. The plural nouns in English are realized predominantly through suffixation while Erei primarily takes the processes of replacives, zero morphs and suppletion (Uwen & Ansa, 2018). Because of some peculiar pluralisation processes in Erei, the plural realization of some borrowed English nouns are subjected to the numbering system by mentioning the quantity of the object rather than using replacives, null morphs or suppletion. This particularly applies the plural realization of certain nouns in Erei that is transferred to the loan nouns from English. The English nouns in this group include the following.

Sample B

English (singular)	Erei (singular)	English (plural)	Erei (plural)	Plural translation
phone	fon	phones	fon atat	three phones
window	windo	windows	windo ana	four windows

bridge	biriji	bridges	biriji afa	two bridges
ball	bol	balls	bol dop	ten balls
(motor) park	pak	parks	pak atat	three parks
kettle	kitul	kettle	kitul ana	four kettles
foam	fom	foams	fom afa	two foams
doctor	doto	doctors	doto ubok	five doctors
computer	komputa	computers	komputa dop	ten computers
pole	Pol	poles	pol dop	ten poles

5.1.3 Uncountable Nouns

Uncountable nouns in English do not take the plural inflexion. Uwen and Ansa (2018) have averred that English and Erei demonstrate similar rules in the description of the plural form for uncountable nouns which is usually in terms of the measurement.

Sample C

English	Erei
milk	miliki (insertion)
cement	simen (deletion)
rice	eresi (insertion)
sugar	suga (deletion)
fertilizer	fetilasa (devoicing)
cake	keki (insertion)
kerosene	ikarasin (insertion)
petrol	petro (deletion)
bread	bredi (insertion)
beer	bie

5.1.4 Collective Nouns

Like the countable nouns mentioned earlier, the plural realization of collective nouns in English is usually by the addition of the suffix depending on the final sound segment of the word. However, such class of nouns borrowed into Erei follow similar process applies to the countable nouns class in line with the appropriate plural formation rule in Erei. Depending on the word's length in terms of its syllabic composition (onset, peak and coda). This is realized by insertion, devoicing and/or deletion.

Sample D

English	Erei
police	polisi
university	unifesiti
army	ami
government	gofamen
committee	komiti
club	kulopu
class	kilasi

5.1.5 Loan Translation

A loan translation is a type of borrowing where words representing things that do not have exact lexical items in the receiving language are translated into equivalent words (Richard & Schmidt, 2012). Also, Mathews (2007) sees loan translations as words or expressions which have been formed by translation of equivalent or corresponding words or expressions in another language. The items listed under loan translation do not have direct words representing them in Erei. To give them semantic interpretation for comprehension, words equivalent to the borrowings are assigned in Erei to explain them. Such loan translations create a mental image on Erei native speakers on what is being described using the equivalent words.

Sample E

English	Erei	Loan Translation
highway	etu ahala	white people's road
aircraft	urot eyeng	sky canoe
school	dong uko	books' house
eye glasses	den ahala	white people's eyes
shoe	ekpa adag	feet cover
belt	ekpa (udig) kaki	rope that holds trousers
contraceptive	iron egbang ime	drug that prevents pregnancy
fridge	oben enom (man)	place that cools something
cream	iyen etutungha	rubbing oil
story building	dong eyeng	sky house
Bible	uko ekpenyeng	God's book
pen	oben eje uko	something used in writing book
ink	man uko	book's water
student/pupil	we dong uko	school's child
bathroom	eta- abobo	where they take a bath

6.0 Salient Issues

Speakers of recipient language tend to pronounce borrowed words as they are pronounced in the source language. Where the loanword or expression is widely and continuously used, most speakers would adapt it to the sound system of the receiving language. In some cases, the loanwords still conform to the native segmental inventory, morphological pattern and phonotactic constraints. Most loanwords are translated into meanings slightly from those of the source language (Kenstowicz & Suchato, 2006; Richard and Schmidst, 2012; Ugot, 2013). These are universal characteristics which are also applicable to English loans in Erei. They are subjected to the linguistic processes and structures of the Erei language. The English loans in Erei are influenced by religious, technological, sociolinguistic and cultural, and phonological factors.

6.1 Religious Factors

Before the contact with the Europeans, the dominant religion in Erei was the African traditional religion. It is the platform where the living commune, communicate and offer sacrifices through deities that serve as mediators between them and their dead ancestors. During the era, names virtually reflect the religious and socio-cultural composition of the Erei people.

However, the language (English) and religion (Christianity) altered the crystallized African religion and ‘compelled’ the people to accept Christianity. It was the coming of the Christian missionaries to Erei and the subsequent establishment of churches that catalyzed the bearing of Christian names in addition to existing indigenous Erei names. Names such as James, John, Mathew, Thomas, Paul, Samson and Mary, among others that are dominant in Erei today, are borrowings from the English language as a result of the Christian religion. Gradually, Christian names are becoming the first name of the majority of Erei natives.

6.2 Sociolinguistic and Cultural Factors

The sociolinguistic, cultural milieu of the recipient language often influence the nature and choice of loans adopted from the source language. Erei initially were peasant communities whose occupations were primarily farming, hunting, fishing, palm wine tapping and petty trading. They lived predominantly in huts.

The linguistic profile of the setting before civilization only provided for and accommodated a corpus for the linguistic items available for use within the physical environment then. As civilization and modernity set in, Erei has irresistibly borrowed and accepted (and is still borrowing) from English loans not linguistically accounted for in Erei language. Such loans are often translated into the equivalent words in the indigenous

language that could best describe the object. English words in this order (see Sample E and a few words from other Samples above) are translated into the linguistic equivalents contained in the sociolinguistic and cultural background of the people. For instance, canoe (urot) in the ancient Erei, was then carved by the woodcarvers for fishing in the streams, lakes and rivers, and also as a means of transportation. The sociocultural conception explains its unique characteristic of mobility on waters. This conception of ‘mobility’ is transferred through the process of translation to the description of aircraft as ‘canoe that flies in the sky’. This is achieved through the word(s) formation process combination of two or more equivalent lexical items ‘urot + ‘eyeng’ as corresponding representation in Erei language.

6.3 Technological Factors

Technology refers to the bulk of modern equipment and machinery, discovered and developed through the application of scientific knowledge to ease the way of doing things. As a result of global technological advancement, new words have gained entry into the lexicon of English language which is also loaned to Nigerian indigenous languages including Erei. Some of these loanwords have maintained the phonological structure of the English, while others have adapted to the Erei phonological processes. The examples in this class are as enumerated in Sample B above and others mentioned in Samples F, G, H and 6.4.4 below. Also, the examples in Sample E (see the translation of aircraft in 6.2 above) are described within the English loans borrowed as a result of technological influence.

6.4 Phonological Factors

Bagari (1987) states that the phonological features of language influence the phonological structure and phonetic representation of the loanwords after the application of phonetic approximation to the borrowed raw data which is the crucial stage of adaptation. In the process of adaptation and/or adoption, the pronunciation of the loanword (English language) could be retained, partially or completely altered, but the spelling would certainly comply with the pattern of the receiving language (Erei). The different influences of the phonological pattern of Erei on English loanwords are discussed in the subheadings below.

6.4.1 Substitution with the Closest Erei (Consonant) Sound

Sani (2018) affirms that the basic characteristic of English loanwords in Hausa is that the sounds are substituted with the closest sound in the Hausa language. This is also the case in Erei. Specifically, where Erei borrows English word that contains a particular consonant that does not occur in its phonological system, it chooses the closest consonant

in its inventory and uses it as a substitute. Sani adds that linguists refer to this process as a phonetic approximation or segmental replacement of consonant phonemes. Because of the difference in the phonological pattern of English and Erei, English has certain consonants that do not occur in Erei. Such consonants include q, v, x and z. At the written medium, such consonants are often replaced with the closest consonant sounds. This often results in the replacement of the English orthographic symbols with that of Erei. Diphthongs in some instances are simplified or reduced to one while vowels are inserted initially and finally. The examples in this category are given below.

Sample F

English consonants	Replacement with the closest consonant in Erei			
v	f	government	-	gofamen
v	f	university	-	unifesiti
z	s	police	-	polisi
c	s	rice	-	eresi

6.4.2 Simplification of Consonant Clusters

A cluster refers to the sequence of adjacent consonants occurring usually at the initial, medial or final position in a syllable (Crystal, 2008). Examples in English are the initial [br-] as in *bread*, [-tt-] as in *kettle* and [-st] as in *best*. Although Inya (2011) has argued that a few Erei words have consonant clusters, the claim could not hold sway because it is difficult to find or ‘force’ consonant clusters into Erei lexicon. Given the non-existence of consonant clusters in Erei, the clusters in English loans are simplified, especially where they occur at the medial position in a word.

Sample G

English words	Equivalent loanword in Erei
kettle	kitul
snapp (drink)	sinap

6.4.3 Vowel insertion

Another phonological influence of Erei on English loans is the insertion of vowels in certain positions of a word. The common ones among English loans are inserted between clusters and those that occur at the final position of some words ending with a consonant. In addition to loans in this classification discussed in some sections above, the other examples are given below.

Sample H

English Words	Equivalent loanwords in Erei
bridge	biriji (final position)

bread	biredi (final position)
kerosene	ikarasin (initial position)
police	polisi (final position)
club	kulopu (medial position and final position)
milk	miliki (medial position and final position)
class	kilasi (medial position and final position)
cake	keki (final position)

6.4.4 Complete Adoption

There are instances where Nigerian indigenous languages adopt “completely the morphological and phonological features of the borrowed words” (Sani 2018:215). In such cases, the consonant features and the vowel length are also adopted. Erei, like most indigenous languages in Nigeria, also adopt this process. Because of the dissimilarities in phonological patterns of the two languages, differences occur at the stress level. Some English words adopted ‘completely’ in the Erei language (a few have been mentioned in the above samples). They include pole-pol, foam-fom, beer-bie, sugar-suga, among others.

7. Conclusion

The paper has demonstrated that Erei, like other languages the world over, borrows extensively from the English noun class, and other parts of speech in general, to fill its lexical gap by integrating English loanwords into Erei to increase its vocabulary. Several English lexical items belonging to different types of nouns and their phonological shape in Erei have been enumerated. English words in Erei have been described to be influenced by religious, technological, sociolinguistic, cultural and phonological factors which suggest their ‘shape’ in Erei linguistic inventory.

The lexicon of Erei is seen to be enriched by the gradual addition of English words to its vocabulary to express alien concepts or notions. Although Erei is further empowered through the entry of the loanwords, it is recommended that the use and usage domains of Erei should be expanded from its natural environment to other areas where families of the Erei extraction reside. The language should be reviewed and improved to accommodate emerging linguistic development.

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