

Societal Growth and Linguistic Change: A Survey of Word Borrowing in the Jukun Language of Taraba State

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Abstract

The change in any language at whatever level seems sure and almost natural. However, the rates of changes vary from one language to another depending on the level of influence and pressure on the language. The English language which is adjudged to be the richest in vocabulary has its own share of the high degree of borrowed words from French, Latin, and Greek. This has greatly influenced and changed the status of the language from the old English status to what it is today known as modern English. The Jukun language is not an exception when it comes to word borrowing. As a result of the various levels of contacts of the Jukun people with other tribes either through wars, trade and other forms of social interactions, the Jukun language has so many borrowed words from the Hausa language as well as the Pidgin English. This is done to enable the speakers to be able to communicate freely and intelligibly with their numerous varied neighbours who speak the languages from which the words are borrowed. However, the situation creates problems with the continued existence and development of the Juken language. This work therefore hinges on a survey of some selected words in Jukun language which are borrowed from other languages. In its conclusion, the paper warns against further practice so that the Jukun language would not be absolutely corrupted, and also to avoid the risk of the language going into extinction.

Introduction

Borrowing can be defined as the occasional use of items from one language in utterances of another language (Akindele & Adegbite, 1999: 44). Prasad (2010) sees borrowing as the process of speakers adopting words from a source language into the native language. This arises out of the fact that there is no language in the world that can be regarded as self-sufficient; as such, every language borrows from another. In borrowing, there is no literal lending from one language to another and no returning words to the source language. The words borrowed simply come to be used by a speech community. Borrowing cannot be regarded as a feature of bilingualism or multilingualism alone; it is also a feature of monolingualism. The later factor differentiates borrowing from language interference. In English, we have words such as “resumé”, “elite”, and many more, which are borrowed from French. In Nigeria, each of the indigenous languages borrow lexical items from one another; for example, the words: “awaya” (which means “cables and

other related items”), “kusa” (which means “nails”), and radiyo” (which means “radio”) are borrowed from Hausa into the Jukun language.

It is worthy of mention here that the grammars of all languages change overtime, and no amount of intervention by prescriptive grammarians or language experts can prevent this. Sommerstein, according to Agbedo (2001:137), posits that language contact is an agent of sound change, and he goes further to cite instances that tend to portray language contact phenomenon as a social factor that sets linguistic change in motion. Borrowing is always a consequence of contact between two language communities. Borrowing of words can go in both directions between the two languages in contact. Prasad (2001) opines that the English language is considered to be the richest language spoken in the largest areas of the world. It is treated as the standard language in most of the countries of the world. He also notes that every English speaking country has some distinct characteristic features. He also observes that the English language has the most heterogeneous and varied vocabulary which includes a large proportion of foreign words borrowed from different languages such as Latin, French, Scandinavian, and Celtic languages, among others. These languages have left indelible marks on the English language enough to modify its character and change its structure.

Indeed, the actual process of borrowing is complex. It involves many instances of the use of new words. In some instances, the speakers of the borrowing language understand the source language too, or at least enough of it to utilize the relevant words. They most consciously adopt the new words when they are using the borrowed language, because they most often fit the ideas they wish to express.

The Jukun language, spoken by the Jukun people of Taraba State, is also susceptible to changes. In a quest to meet the global challenges of the time, by being able to communicate well with the outside world, the Jukuns mingle with other people of different tribes and listen to how they speak. They attend schools all over the world and mingle with people of different tribes and backgrounds in the schools they attend. They travel for the purpose of trade. All these situations provide them the opportunities to interact with other people and therefore give them the room to borrow new words outside the ones acquired in their own speech environment at the early stages of their lives. The contacts have given rise to the introduction of new lexical items and expressions into the Jukun language. This, occasionally, results in lack of comprehension among those indigenous to Jukun during their inter-personal communication. This is because those who have not gone out of Jukun land may not understand the others who have travelled or mingled with other people and acquired new words in the language of their host community. It also affects the culture of the people adversely. A study is therefore necessary to critically examine this problem and to proffer solution[s].

Objectives of the Study

Borrowing corrupts the original language. No wonder, therefore, contemporary Jukun speakers do not freely understand one another during inter- personal conversations.

According to Akindele and Adegbite (1999: 45), “Language reflects, expresses and records culture.” The possession of a language inevitably means the acquisition of culture

or vice-versa. Culture, undoubtedly, is the identity of a people. People's language is a significant part of their culture. Obliterate a people's language, and you have exterminated the people. There is an adage which says that a problem identified is a problem solved. This study, therefore, intends to bring to focus the level of corruption of the Jukun language by other languages that it has borrowed from. The knowledge of the problem will help to halt further damage to the Jukun language and thus preserve the Jukun language vis-à-vis their culture.

Areas of the Study

This study is carried out on Jukun language. The Jukuns are the inhabitants of the present day Wukari. Their once powerful Empire, the Kwararafa Empire, was among the Empires that flourished and later collapsed in the Sudan Belt of Nigeria between the 11th and the 18th centuries. According to Kari and Borno Chronicles which were also confined to some extent by oral tradition, the Jukuns are the descendants of the people called "Wapan" who migrated from a place called Yemen in the Arabic Peninsula near Lake Chad at Kukawa, which later became the capital of Kanem in Borno. The Jukuns were warriors of great repute. By the 16th century, they had evolved a sophisticated state known as Kwararafa which by the middle of that century had successfully attacked Kano on three occasions and finally destroyed it in 1571. They also waged successful attacks on towns like Zaria, Katsina, and Gombe. Today, names like "Yakasen" in Kano and "Tudun Jukun" in Zaria are relics of such heroic exploits of the Jukuns in the past.

However, the emergence of the powerful Hausa/Fulani Empires in the 14th and 19th centuries respectively made the Jukuns vis-à-vis their language become objects of campaigns by the rulers of these empires. As a result, they (the Jukuns) were subsequently driven to their present location in the Benue Valleys. In the current Nigerian geographical space, Jukun is in the North-East. The most recent population of the town as estimated by the national population (2006) stands at 8, 5000 persons spread across eight political wards.

Today, the Jukuns are scattered around the Benue Basin as Meek (1931: 1) observes:

...The Jukun tribe occupies in scattered groups that part of the Benue Basin which is bounded by Abinse to the West and Kona to the East, Pindiga to the North and Donga to the South, a stretch of country which roughly presents the confines of the Jukun kingdom of Korrora as it existed at the end of the 18th century.

The Local Government Council – Wukari – to which Jukun belongs, is geographically located in the southern part of the state capital – Jalingo. It shares borders with Gassol Local Government to the north, Donga and Takum Local Governments to the south and Ibi Local Government to the east. It also shares boundaries with Benue State to the south. The town is a linking point between the northern and eastern parts of the country [Nigeria], the federal capital territory and even the Republic of Cameroon. Because of its strategic position, the town is a melting pot that attracts several linguistic groups; hence, it provides a fertile ground for word loaning or borrowing.

The Jukun language which is the indigenous language of the Jukun people has many dialects spoken in different parts of the tribe. These are: the Kpanzon at Takum and Donga areas, the Wanu (Jukun Abinse, in Benue State), the Jibu (in Bali Local Government area), and the Kona (found around Jalingo Local Government Area). These dialects have some slight variations from the Jukun language spoken in Wukari called Wapan. Apart from the Jukun language, which is the dominant language, other linguistic groups also abound to carry their business activities freely. Languages like Hausa, Igbo, Tiv, Yoruba, Fulani, Igala, Idoma, Tarog, Birom, Angas, and Kuteb are used alongside Jukun and the English languages for business transactions. The Jukun language is presently classified under the Benue-Congo East family of the Niger-Congo phylum (Greenberg, 1965). According to Greenberg's classification, the Jukun language is genetically unrelated to the English language which belongs to the Germanic group of languages.

Wukari is also receptive to some important tourists because of the presence of many tourist sites. Some of these sites include: the historic tomb of Sultan Tambari (a one time Sultan of Sokoto Caliphate), the historic crocodile/fish pond and the ancient salt industry in Akwana.

It should be noted that because of the business activities coupled with tourist centres, people move in and out of Wukari on a regular basis. These movements have altered the linguistic set up of the area to a large extent. The modern Jukun language has borrowed a lot of lexical items from the languages that are found around it, mainly Hausa and the Pigin English. This is analogous to the old tradition of the English language, which we noted earlier has acquired the richest position among all the languages of the world.

Our main focus in this study is on the two principal languages from which the Jukun language has copiously borrowed lexical items – the Hausa and the English languages. We opt to study Jukun language in lieu of any other language around the area of the study, because (a) the emergence of Hausas and the Fulanis in the area is making the Jukun language become mere object of campaigns; this is a threat to its existence; and (b) the study, it is hoped, will help bring to limelight the Jukun language; for, to the best of our knowledge, no significant effort has been made towards its development.

Significance of the Study

We earlier noted that the modern Jukun language has heavily borrowed words from other languages that are found around it, particularly the Hausa language. Even though borrowing enriches a language that borrows, in the case of Jukun, the phenomenon has a negative impact on the Jukun language as speakers most often lack mutual unintelligibility during inter-personal interactions. The significance of this study therefore hinges on the fact that:

1. it is a bold attempt to highlight the words that are borrowed thereby correcting the abnormalities that result from the use of the borrowed linguistic items in lieu of the words in the Jukun language,
2. the paper shall serve as a measure that will attempt to halt the seemingly fast growing threat to an impending extinction of the Jukun language and culture, which the continued borrowing may occasion, and
3. it shall also serve as repository knowledge to researchers.

Data and Method of Data Collection

The primary instruments for this study are lexical items. As a result of the fact that the study is absolutely descriptive, the data used in executing it are derived through:

1. some recorded Jukun songs,
2. some selected Jukun literatures, and
3. oral interviews with some Jukun language speakers (literate and illiterate).

Presentation of Data

The researchers do not in any way claim that the data (lexical items) presented here are exhaustive. The data are presented under sub-headings – names of persons, agricultural items, household materials, and items brought about by technology.

1. Names of persons: In the Jukun land, as specified above, the following Hausa names are common:

Jukun Word	Origin [source(s)]	Meaning [English]
Adandi	Danladi (Hausa)	male child born on Sunday
Adanmi	Danlami (Hausa)	male child born on Thursday
Adajuma	Danjuma (Hausa)	male child born on Friday
Abako	Bako (Hausa)	a stranger
Ngode	Godiya (Hausa)	thank God
Useni	Useni (a) (Hausa)	a female twins
Hassana	Hassana (a) (Hausa)	name given to twins
Adantani	Dantani (Hausa)	one born on Monday
Adansabe	Danasabe (Hausa)	one born on Saturday
Abeibu	Bible (English)	Christian holy book
Aduwa (Ade dwa)	Adu'a (Hausa)	prayer or church
Azakka	Zakka (Hausa)	tithe
Beko	Baiko (Hausa)	offering
Amato	Motta (Hausa)	a car or lorry
Ameri	Mary (English)	mother of Jesus
Ishaa	Ishaya (Hausa)	Isaiah
Ayusu	Yusufu (Hausa)	Joseph

2. Agricultural Items

Jukun words	Origin (Hausa)	Meaning [English]
arogo	rogo	cassava
adankali	dankali	sweet potatoes
ayazawa	yazawa	cashew
alemu	lemu	orange
amangoro	mangoro	mango
agwaba	gweva	guava

3. Names of other Household Items

Jukun Word	Origin (source(s))	Meaning
awaya	wire (English)	cables and other related items

abulok	blocks (English)	those used or building houses
akyi	key (English)	items used for locking houses
abenci	bench (English)	long seat, made of plank
adaro	Daro (Hausa)	basin
akpati	akwati (Hausa)	box
akujara	kujera (Hausa)	chair
akopi	copi (Hausa)	cup
alabile	labile (Hausa)	curtain
abuga	guga (Hausa)	well
amudubi	madubi (Hausa)	mirror or eye glasses
atire	tirei (Hausa)	tray
akwaliba	kwalba (Hausa)	bottles
apilo	pillo (Hausa)	pillows
akwado	kwado (Hausa)	padlock
atasa (Agundun)	tasa (Hausa)	dish/plates
asibiti	asibiti (Hausa)	hospital
ada	adda (Hausa)	cutlass
akeke	kake (Hausa)	bicycle
amashin	mashin (Hausa)	motorcycle
asapulu	sapulu (Hausa)	soap
atochi	torch light (English)	torch light
abukwini	yarkunni (Hausa)	earrings
agogo	agogo (Hausa)	clock or wrist watch
achokoli	chokali (Hausa)	spoon
aturare	tulare (Hausa)	perfume
aborodi	bread (English)	bread
ataga	taaga (Hausa)	window

4. Names of items brought about by technology

There are also names/words that are borrowed into the Jukun language unalloyed. These names are recent and they come on board as a result of technological inventions and for effective communication, they have to be adopted the way they came, except for one or two insertions of vowels or removal of consonant(s) where not necessary. A few examples of such words are:

Jukun words	Origin	Meaning
ahanse	handset	mobile phone
abaturu	battery	battery
afanka	fan	standing/ceiling fan
afirigi	fridge	refrigerator
akula	warmer	warmer
arediyo (Apoo)	radio set	radio set
akredi	credit card	Recharge cards
akomputa	computer	of any kind
awivon	wivon	wig(s) women's wig

It is important to observe that the letter “a” is a significant prefix for the majority of lexical items in the Jukun language. Hardly does an average Jukun man say a word without using the letter “a” before such a word.

Conclusion

The study has revealed that the Jukuns, in the course of their numerous battles, expeditions and positional advantage of their capital city, had series of contacts with the Hausas and the Fulanis in the North, the Igbos in the East, the Tivs and the Idomas from Benue State in the south. These age long cultural and trade contacts explain why the Jukun language is now almost filled to capacity with lots of borrowed lexical items from the other languages, particularly from the Hausa language, and a few of other words from pidgin English. The paper regrets that this practice is a looming signal to the extinction of the Jukun language. It foresees that there may come a time a Jukun man may not be able to convey a single and simple meaning in undiluted/uncorrupted Jukun language without a single interference of other languages. It advocates that there is the need for the Jukuns to have a re-think and go back to the drawing board. The researchers recommend that since the Jukun language is one of the dominant languages in Taraba State, it should influence and/or colonize the other languages around it, instead of being colonized.

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