

## **Dissecting the phenomenon of borrowing in Urhobo**

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*The scope of our world is infinite in nature. New entities and phenomena are invented regularly, and as such, the need to constantly expand the vocabulary of any language is important. This is to enable the language to identify any new entity or phenomenon which may not have existed at some point; thus, the introduction of a new entity or phenomenon into a culture is concomitant with the introduction of a new word into its language. A language uses different processes of word formation to incorporate new words into its vocabulary. The most common of these processes is borrowing, which entails copying a lexical item from a language otherwise known as donor language, to another language known as recipient language. The act of borrowing is an upshot of language contact and it is triggered by the need to name a new concept or element. Imasuen (1998/1999) opined that borrowing is one of the several means by which languages adapt in response to a continuously changing socio cultural environment. As a common phenomenon to all languages, borrowing manifests itself in four different forms namely loan word, loan blend, loan translation and loan shift. This study discussed in detail and within the theoretical framework of functional grammar, the phenomenon of borrowing in Urhobo, a Benue-Congo language spoken by the Urhobo people of southern Nigeria. Its centre focus is to determine: (a) the forms of borrowing in the language; (b) rationale for borrowing in the language; (c) the donor languages; and (d) the effect of borrowing on the language. These were achieved through the collection and analysis of written and spoken data.*

### **Introduction**

Language is the most common and most effective means of communication among humans. It is a medium through which the thought or emotion of an encoder is transferred to a decoder. In any human discourse, words are used as references to entities and phenomena. Every entity and phenomenon in a culture requires a distinct word in its language to ensure that such entity or phenomenon is properly identified, thus, all languages have a set of vocabulary which can be expanded from time to time in line with the dynamic nature of the culture of such language. The most common means of expanding the vocabulary of a language is through borrowing. This paper focuses attention on the phenomenon of borrowing in Urhobo with a view to establishing the forms of borrowing in the language, the rationale for borrowing, the donor languages and the effect of borrowing on the language. The work begins with clarifications of two basic terms, Borrowing and Urhobo. This is followed by a discussion of the phenomenon of borrowing in Urhobo using relevant data to establish the kinds of borrowing, rationale for borrowing and the donor languages. An analysis of the pros and cons of borrowing and a conclusion is also contained in the work.

### **Clarifications of terms**

#### **Borrowing**

Borrowing is a process whereby a language incorporates a word into its vocabulary by copying it from another language. According to Ifode (2001:119), borrowing “entails adding new items to a language or dialect by taking them from another language or dialect”.

The language whose lexical item is copied is called DONOR LANGUAGE or SOURCE LANGUAGE, while the ‘copying language’ is called the RECIPIENT LANGUAGE.

However, the term borrowing is sort of misnomer, since it entails taking something with the owner’s consent and with the intention of giving it back after a period of time, but this is not the case. Even the term donor literally means one who gives/donates without expecting a return or anything in exchange but loses the item he/she/it gives. These terms are however acceptable in the field of Linguistics.

### **Urhobo**

The term Urhobo on the other hand has different prongs in its referent. For instance, it refers to an ethnic group that occupies the western part of Delta State in Southern Nigeria. This ethnic group shares common boundary with Isoko to the south-west, Itsekiri to the west, Ijaw to the south, Bini to the north and Ukwani to the east (cf. Ukere 1990).

It also refers to a person or the people collectively from this ethnic group. The people bear linguistic, social and cultural affinity with the people of Uvwie, Okpe, Isoko and Bini. The 2006 Nigeria census indicates that their population is over three million (See Wikipedia).

In addition, it refers to a natural language spoken as mother tongue by this people. It is also spoken by non-native bilinguals/multilinguals. The language is a daughter language of proto-Edoid which belongs to the Niger-Congo phylum of African languages. According to Aziza (2007:272), it has fifteen dialects with the Agbarho dialect as the standard variety.

The term may also be used to refer to something that is of, related to, or that has Urhobo as its origin, as in, ihwo rẹ Urhobo (Urhobo people), emu rẹ Urhobo (Urhobo food) etc.

### **The phenomenon of borrowing in Urhobo**

Like every other languages of the world, borrowing is the most common means by which the vocabulary of Urhobo is expanded. Ndimele (1999:63) posits, “Man has continued to create new words to take care of new ideas or new experiences in his world. So long as humans from different cultural and linguistic background continue to interact, the need to have words to express new objects and ideas will always be there”. When new concepts or elements enter into the Urhobo culture, an exact lexical item is required to identify it, and in most cases, the language resorts to borrowing a lexical item from another language, especially the language through which the concept or element came into the culture. See data one below for examples of borrowed words and the donor language.

#### **DATA 1**

<b>S/N</b>	<b>Borrowed word</b>	<b>Donor language (DL)</b>	<b>Word in DL</b>
a.	isukuru “school”	English	school
b.	igalasi “glass”	English	glass
c.	akiteti “architect”	English	architect
d.	itaba “tobacco”	Portuguese	tabaco
e.	oşete “breakable-plate”	Portuguese	serta

f.	ologbo “cat”	Yoruba	olongbo
g.	ashuebi “bridal train”	Yoruba	aso ebi
h.	Isuya	Hausa	suya
i.	utujoro “scissors”	Portuguese	tesoura
j.	akpu	Igbo	akpu

The above data is a proof of the existence of borrowing in the Urhobo language.

### **Forms of borrowing in Urhobo**

There are basically four forms in which borrowing can occur. They are loan word, loan blend, loan shift and loan translation. Only loan word and loan translation are however realizable in Urhobo.

### **Loan word**

Loan word is a word which a recipient language copies directly from a donor language to refer to the concept or entity it names in the donor language. In most cases, the sounds and spelling of the loan word are modified to conform to the rules of the recipient language. See data two below for examples of loan word.

### **DATA 2**

<b>S/N</b>	<b>Loan word</b>	<b>Donor language (DL)</b>	<b>Word in DL</b>
a.	olęso “head-tie”	Portuguese	leso “handkerchief”
b.	ileme “file”	Portuguese	lima “file”
c.	ukujere “spoon”	Portuguese	colher “spoon”
d.	inama “cow”	Hausa	nama “meat”
e.	ishoshi “church”	English	church
f.	ibo “ball”	English	ball
g.	ipotu “pot”	English	pot
h.	ejime “twin”	Igbo	ejima “twin”
i.	esha “beans”	Yoruba	esha “beans”
j.	osusu “thrift saving”	Yoruba	osusu “monthly”

The above data show that when a word is borrowed into Urhobo as a loan word, unless such a word conforms to the rule of the language, it undergoes morphological or phonological changes. These changes may be partial or total. Aziza (2007:303) stated that “...all nouns in Urhobo begin with vowels and all syllables end with vowels. Any loanword that does not conform to these elements of structure is ‘repaired’ either by introducing epenthetic vowel or by consonant deletion”. Since all loan words in the language are lexical words, especially nouns, this accounts for why data 2 (a) - (h) above were modified while data 2 (i) and (j) were not.

In addition, semantic shift can be applied to a loan word in the language when necessary, as shown in data 2 (d) and (j).

### **Loan translation**

Loan translation involves, using the lexical unit or inner resources of a recipient language to copy all the sense (s) of an entity or a phenomenon from a donor language. Urhobo loan translation is realized by compounding two or more morphemes. The resultant word is either a compound word or a compound-complex word. Data three below are examples of Loan translation in Urhobo.

DATA 3

S/N	Phenomenon/Entity	Loan Translation	Resultant Word
a.	fasting	oweṽwe + echiro “hunger” “bearing”	oweṽwechiro
b.	alcohol	udi “drink” + oḡagan “strong”	udiḡagan
c.	steamship	okḡ “canoe” + erhare “fire”	okḡerhare
d.	radio	ekpeti + re + agboro “box” “of” “speaker”	ekpetiagboro
e.	television	ekpeti + re + ughe “box” “of” “spectacle”	ekpṛtiughe
f.	musician	ḡbo + ine “doctor” “music”	ḡboine
g.	altar	Agbada + re + izobo “bridge” “of” “sacrifice”	Agbadizobo

**Rationale for borrowing**

Languages borrow for different reasons, the most common of which is language contact. Cultures may come in contact for different reasons, and when this happens, words are transferred from one language into another especially when one language does not have a word to name a newly introduced entity or concept and the other does. As Anderson (1973:95) rightly puts it, “when cultures come into contact with one another, borrowing takes place primarily in the realm of lexical item”. The Urhobo language borrowed words from languages with which it has contact, in order to have a word in the language, to describe new concepts or elements which do not exist at some point in the history of Urhobo. Data four are some examples of borrowed words and the donor languages.

DATA 4

S/N	Borrowed word	Donor language DL	Word in DL
a.	ikeki “cake”	English	cake
b.	imidaka “cassava”	Portuguese	mandioca
c.	ugu “pumpkin leaves”	Igbo	ugu
d.	akpere “basket”	Yoruba	akpere
e.	imanu “cow”	Hausa	malu

Another reason for borrowing is economy of words. Urhobo speakers tend to make their utterances as brief and as concise as possible. We want to pass out as much information as possible and at the same time be economical with words. This desire to be economic with words brings about borrowing morphologically simple words to replace some compound or compound complex words in the language. See data five below for examples.

DATA 5

S/N	Borrowed word	(in place of)	literal meaning
a.	ikọzini “cousin”	emọ rẹ iniqvo	children of brothers
b.	itroza “trouser”	ewun rẹ awọ	cloths of leg
c.	iredio “radio”	ekpeti rẹ agboro	box of sounds

Native speakers also tend to borrow words when they do not know the native word for a particular entity or phenomenon, as shown in data six below:

DATA 6

S/N	Borrowed word	(instead of)
a.	igometi “government”	Aladjaibo
b.	iteboro “table”	imeje
c.	ikopodu “cupboard”	idoṛo

**Donor languages**

Portuguese, English, Edo, Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo have served as donor languages to Urhobo. English and Portuguese are however the major donor languages. A vast number of older loan words are from Portuguese while more recent loan words are from English. See data seven below for examples.

DATA 7

S/N	Borrowed word	Donor language	Word in DL
a.	ifeniya “tapioca”	Portuguese	farinha “tapioca”
b.	isabatu “shoes/sandals”	Portuguese	sapato “shoes/sandals”
c.	oro “gold”	Portuguese	ouro “gold”
d.	agbero “tout”	Yoruba	agbero “tout”
e.	akara “bean cake”	Yoruba	akara “bean cake”
f.	iyasere “prime minister”	Edo	iyasere “prime minister”
g.	isuya “roasted beef”	Hausa	suya “roasted beef”
h.	ibanki “bank”	English	bank
i.	ikomputa “computer”	English	computer
j.	akpu “fufu”	Igbo	akpu “fufu”

**Effect of borrowing on Urhobo**

One universal effect of borrowing on languages is language change, and this can easily be noticed from the written records of a language in comparison with its spoken form. Urhobo has undergone considerable changes over the years. A keen observation of written and spoken data shows that these two are sort of different varieties of the language. The reason is, the spoken Urhobo has extensively incorporated loan words into its vocabulary, whereas the written Urhobo is slow in adopting loan words, especially loan

words from the English language. In most cases, loan translation is used in the written language while the spoken language uses the loan word. See data eight below for examples.

DATA 8

	<b>Written Urhobo</b>	<b>Spoken Urhobo</b>	<b>English</b>
a.	uchunuokpotɔba	ikuoromu	quorum
b.	ekpeti rɛ ughe	itelevishoni	television
c.	ogba rɛ eranvwe	izu	zoo

Secondly, borrowing has affected the phonological system of Urhobo. Sounds and sounds cluster which were alien to the sound system of Urhobo have been imported into the language through borrowing. A typical example is the velar nasal sound /ŋ/, and the velar nasal plus voiceless velar plosive cluster /ŋk/ as shown in the words below.

DATA 9

a.	inki “ink”	/iŋki/
b.	onku “uncle”	/oŋku/
c.	ibanki “bank”	/ibaŋki/

In addition, the vocabulary of the language has been enlarged to enable it identify most concepts and entities in its culture. This has enabled speakers express their thought effectively by using the exact lexical item for an entity or phenomenon, and not the use of circumlocution.

### **Conclusion**

With respect to the aim of this paper, we have established the forms of borrowing in the language, the rationale for borrowing, the donor languages and the effect of borrowing on the language. We have shown that out of the four forms of borrowing, only two are realizable in Urhobo, which are loan word and loan blend. Also, language contact, the desire to be economical with words and ignorance of the actual native word for an entity or a phenomenon are the three major reasons for which native speakers of Urhobo borrow words from other languages. In addition, Portuguese, English, Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba are the donor languages of Urhobo, with English and Portuguese serving as the major donors. The effects of borrowing on Urhobo include language change, importation of new sounds into the sound system of the language, and of course, an elaboration of the lexicon of Urhobo.

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