



**The Role of Borrowed Words in Language Development: the Case of
Ejagham and English**

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Abstract

Language is essentially a medium of communication. It is a universal human phenomenon. With it we communicate our ideas, thoughts, emotions and messages. A language has to have the capability to express these phenomena. Sometimes, however, a language does not possess all the words necessary for it to capture all its experiences. At such times, it has to borrow words and expressions from other languages that come in contact with it. Such borrowed items help in enriching, expanding and developing the language. This paper, a purely descriptive work, considers the role of borrowed words in the development of the Ejagham language. Words which came with the English language and for which Ejagham had no equivalent expressions were borrowed from English in order to express the new experiences that came with the coming of the British to Nigeria and that has contributed to the development of the language. We hereby recommend that borrowed words should be used in upgrading and updating the Ejagham language.

Key words: Borrowing, Language, Development, English, Ejagham

Introduction

Language is a universal human phenomenon It is an aspect of culture which is common to all human societies. There is no society without a language, no matter its level of scientific sophistication. It is this characteristic that

distinguishes man as superior to other mammals. With language we communicate our feelings, hopes, aspirations and messages to others. When people from different linguistic backgrounds come into contact, there is bound to be contact between their cultures and languages; there is always a degree of social flux which induces cultural contact. This influences the totality of inherited ideas, beliefs, language, values and knowledge which constitute the shared licence of social action.

In any part of the globe, whenever there are culture contacts of any sort between speakers of different languages, the people concerned encounter new things they want to talk about, and so make use of words from other languages to refer to things, processes, ways of behaviour, organization or thinking for which words or phrases were not available or convenient in their own language. Some of the foreign words so used by individual speakers pass into general currency in the language, but alter in pronunciation in the direction of the sounds and phonological patterns of the language acquiring them. Technically, this process is called borrowing and the borrowed lexical items are known as 'loan words' or 'borrowed words'

Borrowing is a natural process; it is not a degradation of a language. Rather than degrade a language borrowing enhances its development. English language is today a very rich language because it had borrowed heavily from many languages such as French, Latin, Spanish, Italian, Dutch, German, Yiddish, Russian, Scandinavian, Sanskrit, Hindi, Dravidian, Persian, Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, African languages, American Indian languages, Australia, Pacific Islands. Borrowing has therefore left modern English with a greatly expanded vocabulary (Wikipedia).

Borrowing of words can go in both directions between two languages in contact, but usually such borrowing is asymmetrical in the sense that more words go from one side to the other, that is, more words go from the source language to the borrowing language. This is usually because the source language community has some advantage of power, prestige and/or wealth that makes the objects and ideas it brings desirable and useful to the borrowing language community. For example, the Germanic tribes in the first few centuries A.D adopted numerous loan words from Latin as they adopted new products via trade with the Romans. Few Germanic words, on the other hand, passed into Latin (Wikipedia).

1.1 Background of Ejagham Language

Ejagham language is spoken by Ejagham people in the extreme Southeast of Nigeria and Southwest Cameroun. It falls under the Ekoid- Bantu languages of the Benue –Congo branch of the Niger – Congo language family (Crabb 1969:11-12). Williamson and Blench (2000) simply put all Ekoid–Bantu languages, Ejagham inclusive, under the heading ‘Bantoid’ without further specification of its branches. Ejagham language has six mutually intelligible dialects, with varying levels of intelligibility. These are Achan, Etung and Ekin in Nigeria, and Ngunaya, Njimaya and Obang in Cameroun.

There are about 157,000 speakers of Ejagham: 87,000 in Nigeria and 65,000 in Cameroun (Wikipedia). Other ethnic groups such as the Efik and Ibibio refer to Ejagham as Ekoi. The Ejagham of Nigeria have lived and are still living closely with the Efik, Annang and Ibibio people also of Southeastern Nigeria; The Ejagham are best known for their Ngbe ‘leopard’ headdresses.

1.2 History of Contact and Interference between Ejagham and English

The Ejagham people migrated from the Camerouns, from the area around Lake Ijagham, from where the name designating the people- Ejagham – is got. Ijagham is believed to be the cradle of the Ejagham people and is located within Ejagham territory (Onor 1994:13). The speakers of Qua in Calabar appear to be the first Ejagham people to have migrated from the Camerouns. This may explain why intelligibility level between it and other dialects is in the region of 70%. The migrations of the Ejagham people were in a stretch from Cameroun to their present settlements. They did not meet other ethnic groups. After some years the Ejagham of Calabar, the Qua had the Efut also from Cameroun coming to settle in Calabar, as well as the Efik who came from the Orient (Akak 1953:16).

The first contact of the Ejagham people with the English language was during the slave trade. Ejagham villages carried out raids on other (most often weaker) villages in order to have slaves to sell to the white slave merchants. Apart from raids people had slaves to sell by looking into their households or communities for troublesome children and village people who were murderers, robbers, possessors of evil powers which were used negatively against the people, as well as other criminals tendencies. As a result of the contact through slave trade, most items received from the foreigners as gifts and remuneration had no equivalent names in Ejagham. Such items included gins, sweets, guns, towels, silverware, and others. Hence, the Ejagham

people had to adopt the foreign names and pronounce them according to their phonological pattern. This marked the initial point of lexical borrowing into the language.

Afterwards, the British embarked on legitimate trade, dealing on palm oil, elephant tusks, timber and cocoa which were largely produced in Ejaghamland. These items made them come into the hinterland to negotiate and purchase them. Their coming into the hinterland resulted in extensive contact between the Ejagham and the British; this eventually led to colonisation, which brought about the establishment of schools, hospitals and courts. The schools were established with a view to having labour for the colonial machinery and to propagate the gospel. Earlier in the twentieth century, around 1912, P. A. Talbot established his administrative headquarters at Oban, from where he toured his districts. This further aided English to infiltrate more into the Ejagham language.

The graduates of the missionary schools used English in addition to their mother tongue-Ejagham. Sometimes they gave English words for concepts that could be expressed in “native” words, for prestige reasons. This phenomenon spread very fast, to the extent that even the uneducated ones borrowed English words to refer to concepts, ideas, objects, practices and experiences, since they viewed English as a prestigious and socially superior language. Since it was not all loan words that were used to represent new concepts but rather were used to replace native ones, that gave the language a broader range of words for the speakers to use, that is, there were native words and English words which represented the same concepts in use. After independence, the English language became the official language of administration in Nigeria, and as language embodies the culture of a people, English culture was ‘married’ into the individual cultures of Nigerians. The adoption of this foreign culture/ language escalated the borrowing of lexical items from English into indigenous languages of Nigeria, a phenomenon which is still ongoing, even at a faster rate owing to the modernization and sophistication of our local societies. Because of this contact between English and Ejagham, Ejagham has borrowed and continues to borrow English words into its vocabulary in order to be able to express certain social, political and economic realities.

2.0 What is a Borrowed Word?

According to the Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics, lexical borrowing is one of the first phenomena in language contact. It is the adoption of individual

words or even large sets of vocabulary items from another language or dialect. It can also include roots and affixes, sounds, collocations, and grammatical processes. Lexical borrowing can take place as a result of wars (when people from diverse linguistic backgrounds meet as soldiers, civilians or refugees), trade, marriages, etc. It is one of the processes of linguistic change, when one language, the recipient language borrows words from a donor language and incorporates them in its own language. This borrowing and donation of words is not done in the literal sense of the word, for there is no point in time when the borrowing language returns the borrowed items to their source.

Bloomfield (1933:461) distinguishes between three kinds of borrowing. They are dialectal, cultural and intimate borrowings. When the borrowed features come from within the same speech area, we have dialectal borrowing; where the borrowed words come from other languages, we have cultural borrowing; intimate borrowing occurs when two languages are spoken in what is topographically and politically a single community. For example, the Ejagham word *tèbèrè* 'carefully, gently' heard in Efik songs and sayings must have been borrowed from their Calabar Ejagham neighbours – the Qua. Every living language borrows lexical items from one or more languages and there is no language so isolated as to be free from borrowing.

2.1 Factors Which Influence Borrowing

Borrowing is usually triggered off by some factors, which may be political, social or economic. At a point in time Greek was the language of science, arts and philosophy. As a result of this, Latin borrowed a lot from Greek because of Greek prestige in these fields in the ancient world. English also borrowed heavily from French after the Norman conquest and occupation of England, because French was the language of government, education and business. Some of the factors which influence borrowing are discussed in the sections that follow.

2.1.a Political Factor

Political factors like conquest and colonisation can trigger off borrowing. Colonisation is the stronger of the two. The result of the British colonisation of Nigeria is seen in the large number of political terms which are borrowed into Ejagham. In other words, when a people is conquered, the conqueror's language usually forces itself into the language of the conquered. The British lords forced their system of government on Nigerians. Consequently, English

political terms were borrowed by Ejagham to accommodate the new experience. Examples of such words are clerk, police, government, election, magistrate, and soldier which are rendered in Ejagham as krâk, bûrûsi, gòvàmèn, èrègson, màgésiri, sùyà. As these examples show, the borrowed words are usually transformed or pronounced according to the phonology of Ejagham. Even after independence, Nigeria still adopts a foreign political culture, hence, the language used in political parlance is dominantly borrowed words of where the said culture comes from. Political contact therefore, whether forced on the people or voluntarily put in place by both cultures influences lexical borrowing.

2.1.b Social Factor

Social factors such as education, religion, social stratification and cultural contact aid the spread of lexical borrowing. In the area of religion, for example, since the advent of Christianity, Ejagham has extensively borrowed words to accommodate the new experiences brought by it. Examples of such words include names of persons, activities and objects such as Joseph, Mathew, Andrew, Bishop, communion, Peter, Juliana, which are rendered in Ejagham as Josep, Matiu, Andru, bisop, kòminìon, pita and juriana.

Western education is a culture of the 'whitemen'. It has given birth to bilingualism and multilingualism. Ejagham bilinguals borrow heavily from English to be able to refer to new experiences, and even replace native items by English names. This phenomenon has also affected the uneducated as they also adopt these borrowed forms in order to fit into the ever changing society. Cultural contact encourages lexical borrowing a lot. As two cultures meet, new experiences are acquired and names must be given to them; the foreign words are readily adopted by the borrower. As Ejagham came into cultural contact with English, new experiences were adopted, and such experiences are referred to by their original names though they are pronounced according to the phonology of Ejagham. Example, of such borrowed words include chalk, radio, machine, sugar, goal post.

2.1.c Economic Factor

The expression vacuum created in a language that has come in contact with another that is richer can give rise to borrowing. Economic activities such as trade and career are among the forces which drive a language to borrow words from another language. The slave trade and later the legitimate trade brought Ejagham into contact with new products and materials which were

of British origin. The integration of these new products into Ejaghamland inevitably gave rise to the borrowing of English words such as razor, beer, coffee, bucket, fork, television, fan, carpet, generator by Ejagham.

The British also introduced new careers and white collar jobs to the Ejagham, hence they borrowed the English words to accommodate these new professions such as lawyer, doctor, engineer, teacher, tailor, manager, actor, which are rendered in Ejagham as *dɔya*, *dɔtka*, *inginia*, *chichâ*, *t rɔ*, *man dɔã* and *aktɔ*. Institutions which are directly associated with these words such as bank and post office, are also adopted into Ejagham.

2.2 Reasons for Lexical Borrowing

Some of the reasons responsible for the changes in the lexicon or vocabulary of many languages include necessity, prestige and intercommunication.

a) Necessity

The most obvious reason behind borrowing is the need to fill the communication gap between languages as they come into contact. When such need arises, languages borrow words to accommodate new experiences. The contact between Ejagham and English brought new practices, concepts and ideas which had not been in Ejagham culture. Consequently, the need arose for Ejagham to adopt English words in order to bridge the communication gap and meet the changes which occurred in the life and culture of its speakers. For instance, words such as sweet, petrol, motor, kerosene, goal, were new items to the Ejagham people, hence Ejagham borrowed and pronounces them as *swid*, *petrol*, *moto*, *karas n*, *gol*.

b) Prestige

When two languages come into contact, they affect each other. Generally, the one spoken by a more powerful group – politically, technologically, militarily or in all these ways is looked upon as a superior language (Essien 1987:13). In line with what Essien asserts, Ejagham borrows words from English because English is considered to be a more prestigious and socially dominant language. Among the educated and elite Ejagham also, borrowed words are sometimes used to show off superiority or superior learning over other members of the same speech community. Borrowed words are used here for prestige reasons. Let us consider the following utterance by an Ejagham bilingual.

i) Ntèm ojàk stadium ènyànè a? Match àrèna nà? Friend cgo stadium yesterday Question marker match c be Asp how 'Friend did you go to the stadium yesterday? How was the match?'

The utterance above suggests that the speaker adopts borrowed words to replace the native Ejagham words for prestige reasons. The words adopted are; 'stadium' and 'match'.

c) Low Frequency of Occurrence

Sometimes, borrowed words from English are adopted into Ejagham to refer to native objects or concepts whose names are not convenient and frequent in the language. That is, due to the low frequency of occurrence or usage and due to unfamiliarity, speakers adopt borrowed forms to easily accommodate the unpopular indigenous names which are often regarded as outdated. Words like bed, window, door, cup, Saturday, are borrowed words which have their equivalent in Ejagham, but are neither frequent nor convenient. The equivalents are ebuni for bed, mbu for door, nkun for cup, mm̩nembu for window and Saturday is pronounced satid.

2.3 Types of Borrowed Words

Languages borrow freely from all spheres of life to increase their vocabularies. Certain classes of words like nouns, verbs, adjectives (open class) are more easily borrowed than words from the classes of pronouns, conjunctions, prepositions, etc (closed class). Borrowed words in Ejagham fall into the open class category. They are discussed under the following types: political, social/ cultural, technical/ scientific and general.

2.3 a Political Borrowed words

As stated earlier, borrowed forms in this category are as a result of political governance which came through colonisation. They are stripped of their original pronunciation and assimilated into the phonology of Ejagham to sound like Ejagham words. Some examples are shown below:

Gloss	Phonetic Transcription	Borrowed form in Ejagham
Chairman	[ˈtʃeəmən]	[tʃ m̀àn]
Councillor	[ˈkəʊnsələ]	[k̀áns l̀ə]
Magistrate	[ˈmæd̩ɪstreɪt]	[m̀áj síri]
Solider	[səʊld̩ɪə]	[suj̀â]

2.3.b Social / Cultural Borrowed words

Borrowed words under this category came into Ejagham through cultural and religious contact with the British. Some examples given below.

Gloss	Phonetic Transcription	Borrowed form in Ejagham
Cinema	[ˈsɪnəmə]	[s nì má]
Powder	[ˈpaʊdə]	[pɔ̃dâ]
Guitar	[ˈgiːtə:]	[kìtá]
Chalk	[ˈtʃɔ:k]	(tʃɔ̃k)
Stamp	[stæmp]	[stâm]

2.3 c Technical/ Scientific borrowed words

Because of the large number of inventions these days, and because of advancement in international communication, borrowed words pass from one language to another on a scale that is probably unprecedented. In order to keep pace with the inventions and changes in the world, Ejagham has adopted technical and scientific forms borrowed from English, such as the following:

Gloss	Phonetic Transcription	Borrowed form in Ejagham
Computer	[kəmˈpju:tə]	[kɔmpút]
Television	[ˈtelɪvɪʒn]	[tbisɔn]
Telephone	[ˈteləfəʊn]	[téréfôn]
Electric	[ɪˈlektrɪk]	[r grí k]

2.3.d General Borrowed words

Nouns seem to be the most frequently borrowed class from English into Ejagham. Borrowed forms under this heading are found in all spheres of life as shown below;

Gloss	Phonetic Transcription	Borrowed form in Ejagham
Madam	[ˈmædəm]	[mmàdâm]
Shilling	[ˈʃɪlɪŋ]	[sírɪŋ]
Sandals	[ˈsændls]	[sàndàs]
Peter	[ˈpɪtə]	[pítâ]
Shirt	[ʃɪ:t]	[sícɔ]
Trousers	[ˈtraʊzəz]	[trɔ̃sâ]
Bank	[bæŋk]	[bâŋ]
Pound	[paʊnd]	[bɔn]
Aeroplane	[ˈeərəpleɪn]	[éròprên]
Barracks	[ˈbærəks]	[bárik]

Sometimes, whole words are borrowed or lifted from English and planted in Ejagham without any phonological restructuring in order to avoid distorting

their original meanings. Certain concepts in religion technology, science, law and the military profession belong to this class of borrowed forms. Examples of such borrowed forms include cross, x-ray, wine, commander, baptism, laboratory, psalm, hijack.

Having discussed the different types of borrowed words in Ejagham, it is necessary to make a phonological and semantic analysis of these words, since the analysis is pertinent to lexical borrowing.

3.0 Phonological Analysis and Modification of Borrowed words

When two languages come into contact, and the less culturally sophisticated one borrows from the sophisticated, there is always the need to modify and adapt the borrowed words into the morphological and phonological systems of the recipient language. Phonology is concerned primarily with the sound patterns of individual languages, and, according to Hyman (1975:3), a phonological study refers to the inventory of segments and non-segments in a language. Two languages can have similar phonetic segments but their phonologies remain different. This is the case with Ejagham and English which have similar consonants and vowels, but different phonologies. One significant fact about borrowing is that the borrowed words are absorbed or assimilated into the sound system of the recipient language. That is to say that the borrowed words are not only absorbed into Ejagham, they have also been subjected to a process of phonological metamorphosis to fit into Ejagham orthography and spelling system.

English words borrowed into Ejagham are found especially in the area of new items, ideas, concepts, religion, law, politics, justice, government, general merchandise, and so on. Let us have an analysis of some of them.

3.1 Bilabials

- | | | | | |
|----|-----------|--------|----------|-----------|
| a) | [‘p ni] | —————> | [bénî] | ‘penny’ |
| b) | [baibl] | —————> | [bábùrù] | ‘bible’ |
| c) | [mǎ’jin] | —————> | (màs n) | ‘machine’ |

The bilabial sounds /p,b,m/ are present in both languages, thus they do not pose much problem to Ejagham speakers. The sounds /b/ and /m/ occur in all word positions in English and Ejagham, unlike in English, /p/ does not occur in word initial position which causes the voiced counterpart /b/ to be substituted for it at that position as in 3.1.a above.

3.2 Labio- dentals

The two labio-dental consonants of English are /f/ and /v/: one of these, /f/, is present in Ejagham and occurs in word initial and syllable initial positions. Thus loan words with /f/ pose no problems of articulation in Ejagham. Conversely /v/, the voiced counterpart of /f/, is not found in Ejagham phonology but the sound is not replaced by /f/ in borrowed words; the borrowed words are pronounced with the /v/ sound they contain, as in

- a) [vinigə] → [vɪn gâ] 'vinegar'
 b) [Veronikæ] → [v rɔ̃nikâ] 'Veronica'

3.3 Dentals

The sounds /θ/ and /ð/ are English sounds. These two sounds are completely absent from Ejagham phonology. Borrowed words which contain them are usually pronounced with /t/ and /d/ respectively as shown in the examples below:

- a) [mæθə] → [màtá] 'Martha'
 b) ['mæθju] → [mátíù] 'Mathew'
 c) [ðen] → [dên] 'then'

3.4 Alveolars

While some of the alveolar sounds /t, d, s, n,r/ are found in both English and Ejagham, others like /l/ and /z/ which occur in English occur only in two dialects of Ejagham, Ngunaya and Obang, all in Cameroun. Borrowed words with /l/ and /z/, however, do not pose any problem to Ejagham speakers as /z/ is pronounced the way it is pronounced in the source language but /l/ is pronounced as /d/. Some examples are given below:

- a) [ziŋk] → [zîŋ] 'zinc'
 b) [zip] → [zîp] 'zip'
 c) ['reizə] → [rézɔ̃] 'razor'
 d) ['lɒkə] → [dɔ̃kâ] 'locker'
 e) ['letə] → [d tâ] 'letter'

3.5 Palatal – Alveolar

English sounds under this category are /tʃ/ /dʒ/, /ʃ/ and /ʒ/. The first two are found in Ejagham, but /ʃ/ and /ʒ/ have /s/ substituted for them in borrowed words, as shown below.

- a) [tʃek] → (tfék) 'cheque'
 b) [dʒosef] → [dʒòs f] 'Joseph'
 c) (ʃilɪŋ) → [sirɪŋ] 'shilling'
 d) ['leɪʒə(r)] → [d sɔ̃] 'leisure'

3.6 Velars

The three consonants in English are /k/, /g/ and /ŋ/. All are found in Ejagham though the uneducated among the Ejagham still pronounce borrowed words with /g/ as if they had /k/:

- a) [glas] → [karasi] 'glass'
b) [gæri] → [kàri] 'garri'

Borrowed words, with /k/ and /n/ sounds do not constitute any problem to speakers.

3.7 Vowels

Concerning vowels, /i, ,e,ə,u,ɔ,ɔ,a/ are common to both languages; the other vowels of English /æ/,/ɔ/ are not found in Ejagham; they are always replaced by the nearest sounds whenever, they occur in borrowed words. Some examples are given below:

- a) ['pæsi:v] → [pási:v] 'passive'
b) [ʃi:t] → [sí:d] 'shirt'

Apparently, it has been observed that modifications which change borrowed words to sound like Ejagham native words include:

- Insertion of a vowel to break consonant clustering
- Replacement of stress by tone marks
- Loss of aspiration where it is heard in the native speaker's rendition
- Replacement of difficult sounds by their equivalents in Ejagham.
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4.0 The role of English Borrowed words in the Development of Ejagham

No language is an island, languages borrow words freely from one another to accommodate new experiences for which the borrowing language has no words of its own. Coining of new words from existing ones for new experiences is usually difficult compared to borrowing which provides easier and ready words for new experiences in Ejagham. Lexical borrowing has helped Ejagham to update its vocabulary and be current with the trend of changes in the world and in the life and culture of its speakers.

4.1 Summary

This paper has been concerned with the role of borrowed words in language development as evidenced in Ejagham which borrowed from English. It started with introductory facts, giving the background of Ejagham and the history of contact between Ejagham and English. We have seen that trade,

Christianity and colonisation have brought Ejagham into contact with English. This contact has brought borrowed words into Ejagham. As the British came into Ejaghamland, some of the new experiences which came with them had no equivalents in Ejagham. Thus, Ejagham adopted English or 'foreign' words. This has been investigated by this paper in addition to advancing reasons and factors which influence word borrowing. Of all the characteristics of language, productivity is most relevant to vocabulary development which is the ultimate product of word borrowing.

4.2 Conclusion

Based on feedback from the research and data analysis, it is a fact to conclude that no language is an island. When a language finds its internal communicational capabilities to be inadequate, it has to borrow from foreign resources. Any language which is short of vocabulary should devise some means of enriching itself; such means can include borrowing as Ejagham has been doing. We should not loathe borrowed words, whether words are lexical or structural, as both help to consolidate our vocabulary.

4.3 Recommendations

It is hereby recommended that borrowed words should be used in upgrading and updating the Ejagham language. Whenever and wherever the language finds its internal communicational capabilities to be inadequate, it should opt for the 'foreign' word which comes with the new experience.

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