

Loan Words and their Re-classification in Bantu Languages: The Case of French Loan Words in Tshiluba

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Introduction

“Borrowing” as defined by Crystal (1985:36) “refers to linguistic forms being taken over by one language or dialect from another”. Such “borrowings” are usually known as “loan words”. Borrowing is a universal linguistic process in that where two languages or dialects are in contact, that process must necessarily take place. Generally, it is from the master’s language that words will be borrowed by the language spoken by those who are, or consider themselves to be, in a weak position to express some of the concepts known already in the master’s language. In this paper, by master’s language, we mean the language which was spoken by the Belgians, once colonizers of Congo Kinshasa. That language was French. The loan words we are dealing with in this paper are from the French language. The master’s language, occasionally, can borrow some words from the subjects’ language, especially when that master’s language is learned/spoken by the subject. Some concepts unknown in the masters’ language can be expressed by such speakers by using words from their language.

In any case, borrowing takes place when speakers of a particular language face some realities which they did not know previously in their cultural world, which realities need to be translated in their languages. For example, the word **nkoloko** (from English ‘clock’) is now part of the word stock of the Bemba language which, did not have any word of its own to express that concept before its contact with English. As can be seen from the loan word ‘nkoloko’ most borrowings undergo some changes or modifications for a better or full integration in the borrowing language. These changes can be phonological, morphological, syntactic or semantic.

Since it is not possible to deal with loan words in Bantu languages in general, in this paper, we shall focus on French loan words and their reclassification in Tshiluba, a Bantu language, spoken in Kasayi in Congo/Kinshasa. Reclassification is viewed as one of the conditions for these loan words to be fully adopted by Tshiluba and be part of the Tshiluba word stock.

Why have we chosen French loan words in Tshiluba in particular when one knows

that such French loan words can be found in other Bantu languages spoken in Congo? Why French loan words and not English loan words or loans from other languages already spoken in Congo? The reason is simple. French is one of the foreign languages which play a major role in Congo. It is one of the languages of the former colonizing country, Belgium, and it has been adopted as the official language and the medium of instruction in the country. French comes second for most Congolese after their first language. Today, French is spoken as first language by many children from the middle class and children from intertribal marriages. French enjoys some social prestige that no other language in Congo does.

Tshiluba is one of the four national languages in the country. There is no special reason for us for having chosen this particular language. But we believe that the linguistic behaviour of Tshiluba in adopting loan words, more particularly in their reclassification, is similar to that of any other Bantu languages spoken in Congo if one believes in the noun classification and reclassification as a common process to Bantu languages.

Noun Structure and Classification

In Bantu languages, the structure of the noun, as Johnston (1922:239) put it, consists of 'a detachable prefix changing according to the number (singular or plural) or quality of the virtually unchangeable noun-root; and sometimes of 'a suffix' (either to modify or extend the meaning of the root). In Tshiluba, the structure of the noun is similar to that of the noun in Bantu languages in general. Indeed, for each noun three parts at least can be distinguishable: the **root** which is unchangeable, the **prefix** and the **suffix** (See Katsuva 1987).

This study, does not focus on the noun root and the suffix separately, but treats the **noun stem** (root+suffix) as a whole and the **noun prefix**. For example:

mulume (man)	mu - lume prefix stem
balongeshi (teachers)	ba- longeshi prefix stem
tshikasu (spade)	tshi- kasu prefix stem

As far as noun classification is concerned, in Bantu languages as well as in Tshiluba, nouns are classified by a system of prefixes, termed **Class prefixes** (see Ashton et al. 1954, Guthrie, 1967) according to their genders (human, neutral) numbers, (singular, plural, collective) and natural kinds.

Following Johnston (1922) and Meinhof (1932) in their attempts to establish a noun classification in Bantu languages in general, each noun stem is preceded by a prefix which can be assigned a number. Although both authors did not agree on the number and forms of noun prefixes (see appendix II) they found many common features in their noun classification system concerning the gender concord operating between the noun and its modifier and between the noun as a subject of the sentence and the predicate. Tshiluba, as a Bantu language, obeys the same rule as the following example can prove:

Tshi-ntu	tshi- mpe	tshi- di	mu-shinga	mu-kole		
NP-Nstem	Adj.P	Adjstem	VP.V	NPNstem	Adj.P	Adj stem.
Tshintu	tshimpe	tshidi	mushinga	mukole		
'Any good thing/object has a high price'						

In Tshiluba, we have eighteen noun classes (see appendix II). Each nominal in the word stock of Tshiluba must be assigned a prefix depending on the gender (human, neutral), number (singular, plural, collective) and underlying natural kinds. By natural kinds we mean that each noun class denotes an underlying idea/meaning such as human beings, objects, body parts, water and other liquids, animals, abstractness, diminutive, augmentative, place location etc. (see Katsuva 1987:11-14).

Noun Re-classification

Although each noun stem is given one prefix appropriate to the gender and number which that noun is associated with, all stems can undergo what Lyons (1968:282) and Brown (1972:12) have termed 'secondary recategorisation' or reclassification (in this paper), i.e each noun stem can be assigned another class prefix apart from its original or usual one. Indeed, the most common reclassification consists of diminutive, augmentative and abstractness. Most nominals in Bantu languages can be reclassified by adopting class prefixes underlying the idea of augmentative, diminutive or abstractness.

In Tshiluba for example, we have:

mu -	lume	mulume 'man' (sing.)
Cl ₁	stem	
ba -	lume	balume 'men' (plur.)
Cl ₂	stem	
ka -	lume	kalume 'little man' (sing., dim.)
Cl ₁₃	stem	
tu -	lume	tulume 'little men' (plur., dim.)
Cl ₁₂	stem	
tshi -	lume	tshilume 'big man' (sing., aug.)
Cl ₇	stem	
bi -	lume	bilume 'big men' (plur., aug.)
Cl ₇	stem	
bu -	lume	bulume 'manhood' (sing., abstr)
Cl ₁₄	stem	

As can be seen, the general principle in Tshiluba noun classification is that any noun must have a noun class prefix for that noun/word to belong to the Tshiluba word stock. Apart from the usual noun class prefix that each noun must have, the same noun can be reclassified by assigning it another prefix as the examples above have demonstrated.

From this principle of classification and reclassification, each word entering Tshiluba through borrowing must also be assigned a class prefix for its full integration in the vocabulary. In the following pages we shall see how this (re) classification operates with French loan words in Tshiluba.

Re-classification of French Loan Words

Most French loan words in Tshiluba are given a class prefix as the following examples can illustrate:

buluzu	bu-	luzu	from French 'blouse' [bluz] (blouse, sing.)
Cl ₁₄	stem		
maluzu	ma-	luzu	(blouses, plur.)
Cl ₆	Stem		
kalasa	ka-	lasa	from French 'classe' [klas] (class, sing.)
Cl ₁₂	Stem		
tulasa	tu-	lasa	(classes, plur.)
Cl ₁₃	Stem		

bulɔsɔ	bu-lɔsɔ	from French 'brosse' [brɔs] (brush, sing.)
Cl ₁₄	Stem	
malɔsɔ	má-lɔsɔ	from French 'brosses' (brushes, plur.)
Cl ₆	Stem	

There are some loan words, however (not many of course), which do not agree with any of the prefixes of Tshiluba, mainly in their singular form. We shall term such words 'zero class prefix' nouns. Most of such words, surprisingly, take the class prefix **ma** (class 6) for their plural form although there is nothing in their singular form which would make this **ma** prefix predictable as is the case with all other nouns forming their plural with **ma**. Those 'zero class prefix' loan words denoting human beings take class 2 prefix **ba-** for their plural. For example:

biki	from French 'bic' [bik] (pen, sing.)	ma-biki	'bics' (pens, plur.)
bulɛ	from French 'bleu' [blø] (blue, sing.)		
ma - bulɛ	'bleu' (blues, plur.)		
tajɛɛ	from French 'tailleur' [tajœr] (tailor) >ba -tajele (tailors, plur.)		
mɛnwizjɛ	from French 'menuisier' [mcnwizje] (joiner, sing.)		
ba - mɛnwizje	(joiners, plur.)		

As one may have noticed, French loan words undergo, not only some phonological (pronunciation) changes but also grammatical, syntactic and semantic changes when they are adopted by Tshiluba. Since we cannot deal with these changes in a paper of this length, we shall concentrate only on pronunciation modifications as we believe that such modifications go together with or dictate the form of the class prefix. If one goes back to the few examples above, i.e buluzu (from French 'blouse' [bluz] kalasa (from French 'classe' [klas], bulɔsɔ (from French 'brosse' [brɔs] etc., one notices the following changes:

From French 'blouse' [bluz] (blouse) we have [buluzu] in Tshiluba

We come to [buluzu] after the following processes:

Firstly, vowel insertion applies: a vowel, in this case [u], is inserted between [b] and [l] of the consonant cluster [bl] to obey the syllable structure pattern of Tshiluba which is cvcv as in most words. For the same reason, another vowel, [u] is added at the end of the word, after [z]. Indeed, no word in Tshiluba ends in a consonant. After vowel insertion,

the French word 'blouse' [bluz] sounds [buluzu] in Tshiluba.

Secondly, apart from vowel insertion, we have vowel assimilation or vowel harmony in operation.

e.g	Fr. classe [klas]	Tsh [kalasa]
	Fr. brosse [brɔs]	Tsh [bulɔsɔ]

There are some French loan words which have been nasalized even when there is no nasalization at all in their French pronunciation. This nasalization may affect words beginning with or containing [s,k,t,p] sounds in French as in the following:

French 'quinine' [kinin] becomes [ŋkinina] in Tshiluba.

Fr. 'sentinelle' [stinɛl] becomes [nsɛntɛdi] in Tshiluba.

Fr. 'sucre' [sykr] becomes [nsukadi] in Tshiluba.

Fr. 'patate' [patat] becomes [mpatata] in Tshiluba.

As this paper's main gist is the reclassification of French loan words in Tshiluba, the question at this point is to know how Tshiluba has come to the class prefixes such as **bu-** (Cl₁) for 'buluzu' (blouse), **ka-** (Cl₁₃) for 'kalasa' (classe), **bi-** (Cl₈) **N-** (Cl₉) for 'kinina' (quinine) etc.

From the way those loan words sound in French, the pronunciation in Tshiluba tries to approximate that of French while at the same time adopting its own. The first syllable that Tshiluba gives to a loan word determines the noun class prefix of that word.

Indeed, when we take the loan word 'kalasa' (classe), we notice that the first syllable 'ka' sounds like class prefix ka- (Cl₁₃) in Tshiluba. Automatically, kalasa will behave like any Tshiluba word belonging to this class as the plural of 'kalasa' in this case 'tulasi', shows, in fact, in Tshiluba nouns in class 13 form their plural by the class prefix tu- (Cl₁₂): e.g. ka- nyunyi (bird) tu-nyunyi (birds).

As far as vowel insertion is concerned, in French loan words it does apply not only to break up consonant clusters (or consonant sequences) or after a consonant in final position as most examples can prove, but it can also apply at the beginning of a word as in the following loan words:

Fr. radio [radjɔ]	Tsh [aladijɔ]
Fr. rapport [rapɔr]	Tsh [alapɔlɔ]
Fr. Robert [rɔbɛr]	Tsh [ɔlɔbɛlɛ]
Fr. robe [rɔb]	Tsh [ɔlɔbɛ]

In Tshiluba, generally the prothetic vowel applies in French loan words which begin with [r] sound in French. In such words, not only a vowel is inserted initially in the loan word but the French consonant sound [r] is also substituted by [l] as the examples above can show. Here too, the choice of the initial vowel is in harmony with the vowel in the first syllable of the French word. For example, if the vowel in the first syllable is [ɔ] as in French 'robe' [rɔb], when borrowing this word, the inserted vowel (a prothetic vowel indeed) will be [ɔ] and the [r] sound is substituted by [l] to give the pronunciation [ɔlɔbɛ].

If the vowel in the first syllable is [a] as in French 'radio' [radjɔ], the prothetic vowel will be [a], and the whole word will be pronounced [aladijɔ] with all the changes similar to those experienced by other French loan words in Tshiluba. Most of these words with a prothetic vowel are classified 'as zero class prefix nouns'. Indeed, they do not agree with any class prefix in the noun classification of Tshiluba for their singular

form. Such words, as we saw earlier, are prefixed, however, with **ma-** for their plural if they denote objects or **ba-** if they denote human beings.

As a principle, we may state that the noun class prefix which is given to any loan word is always determined by the way the first syllable of the loan word sounds and approximates some sounds characterizing class prefixes in Tshiluba. The following examples confirm the principle.

bifuteke (from French beefteak), [biftek]
 bi-futeke (plural)
 Cl₈ stem

N.B. There is no singular form for this word 'bifuteke' in Tshiluba

kalasa (from French 'classe' [klas] ka - lasa (sing.)
 Cl₁₃ stem
 tulasa tu - lasa (plural)
 Cl₁₂ stem

bisikwi (from French 'biscuit' [biskwi] bi - sikwi (plural)
 Cl₈ stem

tshisikwi tshi-sikwi (singular)
 Cl₇ stem

It should be noted, however, that some of these loan words can take double prefixation in some cases. For example, 'mashinyi' (from machine) which, from its first syllable **ma** belongs to class 6, can be reclassified in class 13 (ka-) and class 12 (tu-) while keeping its first prefix. We can easily hear 'kamashinyi' (small car) and 'tumashinyi' (small cars) or class 7 (tshi-) 'tshimashinyi', (big car) and class 8 (bi) as in 'bimashinyi' (big cars).

Conclusion

As our reader may have noticed, when loan words enter the word stock of another language their reclassification is inevitable. The principle of reclassification is common in Bantu languages in general and in Tshiluba in particular. Although we have not been able to supply examples in other Bantu languages apart from Tshiluba, we hope that from the few examples which have been given, some of the observations made in this paper can be made or tested for any other Bantu language borrowing words from another language.

There is another phenomenon that the reader should be aware of as far as loan words are concerned. When one considers the phonological (pronunciation) modification which loan words undergo, one comes to realize that whenever we borrow words from another language we tend to adopt them with some carelessness. Very little effort is made to pronounce them the way they are in the source language even when linguistically no factor would hinder us to do so. For example, what would prevent a Tshiluba native speaker from pronouncing correctly the French word 'boulon' [bulɔ̃] when he/she borrows this word from French into his/her language? Most sounds in that French word can be easily realized by Tshiluba native speakers. Unfortunately, instead of pronouncing [bul] the word sounds [bulu] simply because the Tshiluba speaker wants to make any loan word totally his/hers in

conformity with the Tshiluba phonotactics, sometimes making even unnecessary and funny modifications.

As one may also have noticed, some French loan words have been so accommodating or assimilating with Tshiluba that it becomes difficult to tell that those words are borrowed from French. An example, in hand concerns words such as 'k a l a s a' (from French *classe*), 'motoka' (from *motorcar*), 'tshilolo' (from *clairon*), 'mule' (from *moulin*). We are convinced that for such words very few Tshiluba speakers would be able to tell that these words are from another language as their assimilation has been very successful. Therefore, loan words should, for their full intergration, conform to the linguistic behaviour of the borrowing language as the above examples can tell.

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Appendix I: French Loan Words

N.B Each loan word is given in its phonetic transcription in singular and plural forms. The French word from which it originates is also supplied.

Singular	Plural	French
1. [aladijɔ]	[maaladijɔ]	radio [radjɔ] (radio)
2. [alapɔɔ]	[maalapɔɔ]	rapport [rapɔr] (report)
3. [ašipidini]	[maašipidini]	aspirine [aspirin] (aspirin)
4. -	bifutɛkɛ]	beefteak [biftɛk] (beefteak)
5. [bike]	[mabikɛ]	bic [bikɛ] (pen)
6. [bulɛ]	[mabulɛ]	bleu [blø] (blue)
7. [bulɔsɔ]	[malɔsɔ]	brosse [brɔs] (brush)
8. [buluzɔ]	[maluzɔ]	blouse [bluz] (blouse) or [buluza] [maluza]
9. [disipasɛɛ]	[masipasɛɛ]	dispensaire [dispásɛr] (dispensary)
10. -	[matɛɛla]	matelas [matla] (mattress)
11. [dišini]	[mašini]	machine [mašin] (machine or car in Tshiluba)
12. [kafɛ]	[tufɛ]	café [kafɛ] (coffee)
13. [kalasa]	[tulasa]	classe [klas] (class)
14. [kalata]	[tulata]	carte [kart] (card)
15. [kamata]	[tumata]	tomate [tɔmat] (tomato)
16. [kanapɛ]	[tunapɛ]	canap [kanapɛ] (sofa)
17. [kanifɛ]	[tunifɛ]	canife [kanif] (knife)

18. [kasɛtɛ]	[tusɛtɛ]	cassette [kasɛt] (cassette)
19. [kaʃo]	[tuʃo]	cachot [kaʃo] (cell)
20. [kajɛ]	[tujɛ]	cahier[kajɛ](exercise book)
21. [lunɛtɛ]	[manɛtɛ]	lunette [lynɛt](spectacles)
22. [lupitadi]	[mapitadi]	hôpital [ɔpital] (hospital)
23. [mɛnwizijɛ]	[bamɛnwizijɛ]	menuisier[mɛnwizijɛ](carpenter)
24. [mɔtɔka]	[mjɔtɔka]	autocar [otɔka] (coach, bus)
25. [ŋkinina]	[ŋkinina]	quinine [kinin] (quinine)
26. [nsɛntɛdi]	[nsɛntɛdi]	sentinelle[sãtinɛl](sentry)
27. [nsukadi]	[nsukadi]	sucre [sykr] (sugar)
28. [ɔlobɛ]	[malɔbɛ]	robe [rɔb] (dress)
29. [tajɛɛle]	[batajɛɛle]	tailleur [tajør] (tailor)
30. [tʃisikwi]	[bisikwi]	biscuit [biskwi] (biscuit)

Appendix II: Noun Class Prefixes

JOHNSTON 1922	MEINHOF 1932	TSHILUBA LANGUAGE IN TSHILUBA	EXAMPLES	NUMBER	UNDERLYING NATURAL KIND
NUMBER & CLASS	NUMBER & CLASS	NUMBER & CLASS			
1. mu	1. mu	1. mu -	mu-lume 'man'	singular	Human beings
2. ba -	2. ba -	2. ba -	ba-lume 'men'	plural	Human beings
3. mu -	3. mu -	3. mu -	mu-tshi 'tree'	singular	Objects such as trees, plants, cords, strings.
4. mi -	4. mi -	4. mi -	mi-tshi 'trees'	plural	
5. li - or di -	5. li -	5. di -	di-boko 'arm'	singular	Body parts
6. ma -	6. ma -	6. ma -	ma-boko 'arms'	plural	Body parts, water and other liquids. ma-luvu 'beer' collective
7. ki-	7. ki-	7. tshi-	tshi-kasu 'spade'	singular	Diversity of natural kinds; sometimes it underlies the idea of augmentation and it is also the language prefix e.g tshi- luba.
8. bi-, (vi-, fi-, pi-, wi-, si-)	8. bin-	8. bi-	bi-kasu 'spades'	plural	
9. N- (in-, I- iny-, e-,)	9. N-	9. N-	N- buji (mbuji) 'goat'	singular	Mainly animals and domestic objects
10. Zi-, Zin-	10. li-, ni-	10. N-	N-buji (mbuji) 'goats'	plural	
11. lu-, du-	11. lu-	11. lu-	lu-kasu 'hoe, spade'	singular	Things which are large (or continuous), thin, big or spread out.
12. tu-	12. tu-	12. tu-	tu-nyunyi 'birds'	plural	Mainly diminutive sometimes with an affectionate sense.
13. ka-	13. ka-	13. ka-	ka-nyunyi	singular	Mainly diminutive sometimes with an affectionate sense.

14. bu-	14. bu-	14. bu-	bu-ndu 'shame'	singular	Mainly expresses states or condition in an abstract sense. May express things in bulk which cannot be thought of singly.
			bu-loba 'earth'	-	
15. ku-	15. ku-	15. ku-	ku-dima 'to cultivate'	-	Denotes verbs in the infinitive
					- prepositional meaning to, towards in relation with human body.
16 pa-	16. pa-	16. pa-	pa-shi 'down'		Location, place
17. mu-	17. ku-	17. ku-	mu-nda 'inside'		Location (in, towards)
18. gu-	18. gu-	18. ku-	ku-le 'far'		Location.
19. ga-	19. pi-	-			
20. la-, da-	20. yu-	-			
21. ta-, (da-)	21. i-				
22. se-, si-, sa-	22. -	-			
23. nya-, na-	23. -	-			