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Borrowing and Code-Switching among Hausa-English Speakers in the North Eastern Nigeria: A phonological analysis

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Abstract

Hausa has borrowed numerous words and expressions from the English language to enrich its vocabulary. Speakers of this language also switch to English in their daily conversation. Almost all of English loanwords and code-switched terms have undergone morphological and phonological modifications when used in Hausa, which has 'spilled' an indigenous flavour over these words. The aim of this paper is to examine the morpho-phonologically-adapted English loanwords and code-switching incorporated in Hausa - a lingua franca used in the northern and north-eastern part of Nigeria, belonging to the Afro-asiatic phylum (Greenberg, 1963). The study focuses on the segmental and syllable-related aspects. Data for this study were collected from participant observation of daily natural conversation of speakers of the language. The study is anchored on Fantini's (1985) framework, which categorises lexical borrowing into two types: adoption and adaptation. Findings reveal that the morpho-phonological adaptation of English loanwords and code-switching in Hausa occurs through such features as vowel epenthesis, vowel addition, vowel and consonant substitution, sound addition and elision, monophthongisation and lengthening of English diphthongs, and grammatico-phonological inflections of English borrowings in Hausa.

Keywords: Adaptation, Adoption, Borrowing, Code-switching, Phonological modifications.

1. Introduction

Nigeria is a multilingual country, with English, the colonial British heritage, used as an official language in the country. It exists

alongside Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa and several other indigenous languages. Being a member of Chadic language, belonging to the Afro-asiatic phylum (Greenbert, 1963), Hausa, like



in Niger, is a lingua franca in northern Nigeria, serving as a language of wider communication for commercial, educational, and governmental purposes. It is therefore one of the three indigenous national languages enshrined in the Nigerian constitution. One of the consequences of such language cohabitation is (lexical) borrowing, code switching, code mixing, interference, language shift, and so on.

Crystal (1987) defines *borrowing* as the introduction of a word or other linguistic feature from one language or dialect to another. It is also referred to as *loanword* in literature. Users of languages unconsciously or deliberately borrow words from one language to another, to express a reality, a concept or an idea in the 'recipient' language which does not possess the adequate standard equivalent of the borrowed concept from the 'donor' language, (a need-filling motive) or enjoy the foreign word as a prestige. Code-switching refers to a common term for alternative use of two or more languages, varieties of a language or even styles.

Also referred to as *code-mixing* or *code changing*, code switching is also the act of "alternation of two languages within a single discourse, sentence or constituent" (Poplack, 1980:583)

The contact between English and Hausa has resulted in words borrowed from the former into the Hausa speakers also switched to English in their speech. These English "hausanised" words have been subject to orthographic, phonetic, phonological and morphological changes or modifications in order to suit the linguistic system of Hausa, the dominant language in Borno State, where Kanuri also has a large number of speakers. This paper examines the morpho-phonological adaptation or incorporation of the English loanwords in Hausa, as well as code-switching from Hausa to English.

2- Literature review

The researcher deems it necessary to differentiate between *loanword/borrowing* and *code switching*. While in code switching, the speaker who switches must be necessarily bilingual, but loanword usage does not require speakers to be

bilingual, although bilingual speakers also use loanwords. Monolinguals are able to use loanwords well, but this cannot be said about code-switching (Obi Yeboah and Akofi Ansah, 2022). In other words, speakers who switch from one language to another do it consciously and are aware of using the two languages, because of their level formal education. By contrast, speakers who borrow words from another language and use it in their L1s or mother tongues generally do it unconsciously: they may not know that they have been using a foreign word, especially when they have a low level of formal education. For example, many Fulani speakers, though some of whom have a low formal educational level, have incorporated some English loanwords like *bokoti* (bucket), *firweel* (free wheel), *makani* (mechanic), *leebura* (labourer), etc., in their daily Fulani speech (Hamidou Bappa, 2022).

Several studies have been conducted by linguists on loanword phonology. One of the prominent is Newman (2000), who investigated the phonological adaptation

of English loanwords in Hausa. He examines consonant substitution in such a process. His findings reveal that the consonant /p/ was replaced by /f/ in such “hausanised” words as /f/roessor (professor), /f/oda (powder), /f/ensir (pencil) and /f/aakin (parking).

A related study was carried out by Mussa and Fagge (2022) who also came up with the same consonantal alternations, in some adapted English loanwords into Hausa. These words include *diploma*, *computer*, *cup*, *pepper-soap* and *primary*, whereby the bilabial plosive /p/ is replaced by the labio-dental fricative /f/, yielding di/f/loma, com/f/uta, ko/f/i, pe/f/er-soap and /f/rimary, respectively. Their findings also reveal the alternation of /v/ to /b/, where the voiced labio-dental fricative sound /v/ changes to bilabial nasal sound /m/, in *direeba* (driver) and *faraabiti* (private), at word medial position before the mid central vowel /e/ and after the mid back vowel /o/ in the process of adaptation of English loanwords into Hausa.

Caron (2013) dwelt on vowel replacement of English segments with Hausa

segments in such words as *organiz/a/* and *racod/a/* (recorder), where the schwa /ə/ was replaced by /a/, and vowel addition in *sugar/i/* (sugar), *simint/i/* (cement), to which the vowel /i/ was attached, as cited in Damun Dakom (2016).

Leben (1996), on his part, explored vowel epenthesis in English words borrowed from Hausa. Such lexemes were adapted and re-syllabified by the insertion of a vowel in-between consonant clusters. The writer found out that some “hausanised” words, such as *gilaashii* (glass), *sifannaa* (spanner), *sikeelii* (scale), *sifirit* (spirit) and *sitamfii* (stamp), have undergone an insertion of the front vowel /i/ between the clusters ‘gl’, ‘sp’, ‘sc’ and ‘st’, respectively, and the rounded back vowel /u/ in *buroodi* (bread) *sufeetoo* (inspector), *suwitaa* (sweater), *sumoogal* (smuggle) *kulooci* (clutch) and *fuloogi* (plug).

In fact, as noted by Hamidou Bappa (2025), Damun Dakom (2016), Baldi (1988), Yalwa (1992), Newman (2000) and Abubakre (2008), Hausa resorts to repair strategies to adapt words borrowed from

Fulani, Arabic and English. These strategies include vowel epenthesis, segment deletion (consonant) and segmental replacement, consonant germination, and syllable elongation.

3. Theoretical framework

This study is anchored on Fantini’s (1985) model, which classifies loanwords or borrowing into categories known as *adoption* and *adaptation*. Adoption refers to the incorporation of lexical items from a donor language into a recipient language without any phonological, morphological or semantic change or modification. According to Furiassi et al. (2012: 12), “if a loanword is imported without any formal change, it is referred to as adopted, non-adapted, unadapted, direct, primary, pure, integral, patent or evident”

Adaptation, on the other hand, is the importation of words or expressions from a donor language into a recipient language, with some changes or modifications. A loanword is adapted if it is changed orthographically, phonetically, morphologically, semantically to comply with the norms of the recipient language system (Furiassi et al., *ibid*). This is what Fantini

refers to as *adjusted borrowing*, as against *pure borrowing* which is adoption.

4- Methodology

Data for this study was collected via participant observation on the 8th of October 2025. This occurred when the researcher was traveling from Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State, in Nigeria. The data collection period or venues ranges from Bama station to Madagali, while traveling by car that brought together Hausa speakers and the researcher. While on the road, the researcher listened to their conversation and jotted down some Hausa sentences and phrases embedding English loanwords or code-switching. There were 23 sentences and 24 phrases written down by the researchers, who themselves can speak and understand Hausa a little. A pen and a paper were therefore used as devices for data collection. The informants were both male and female Hausa speakers, who are not necessarily the native of the language, as Hausa is known to be a lingua franca used by speakers from various mother tongues in the study

area. They include children, teenagers and adults, whose ethnic background and educational level are not known. While the number of informants was unknown, judgmental sampling technique was used to collect data. The researcher considered in the study people speaking exclusively the same language: Hausa.

As the researcher has little understanding of Hausa, he resorted to a fluent French-Hausa bilingual speaker (a secondary school teacher in Maroua, Cameroon) who helped him explain, correct some syntactic or grammatical errors made while jotting down, and translate the data to French. Then, the researcher, being a very fluent French-English bilingual lecturer, translated the treated data from French to English.

5. Data analysis and discussion

Data analysis reveal that the morpho-phonological restructuration of English borrowings and code-switching in the Hausa speech include vowel epenthesis, vowel addition and elision, vowel and consonant substitution,

monophthongisation and lengthening of English diphthongs and grammatico-phonological inflections. Each of these features is elaborated below:

5.1. Vowel and consonant substitution

In the process of adapting the English loanwords in

Hausa, speakers replace English diphthongs with the indigenised Hausa equivalents, weak vowels with strong ones, central vowels with back vowels, and English diphthongs with “hausanised” monophthongs. This is illustrated in table I below:

Table I: Vowel substitution

Hausa speech embedding English loanwords / code-switching	Meaning of the utterances in English	RP sound	Hausa substitutes
Na ɗauko piyo wata	I have brought <u>pure</u> water	/ʊə/	/iyo/
fuwa kwaliti	<u>Pure</u> quality	/ʊə/	/uwa/
Safiya <u>taya</u> daya	A <u>spare</u> <u>tyre</u>	/eə/- /alə/	/iya/ -/aya/
Pasonal bank	<u>Personal</u> bank	/ɜ:/	/a/
Ina kan salary ne	I earn <u>salary</u>	/ə/	/a/
Passindja mubi ?	Is he/she a <u>passenger</u> to Mubi ?	/ə/	/a/

Table I above shows substitution of English diphthongs with those of Hausa. The English sound /ʊə/ was variously restructured as /iyo/ and /uwa/ when producing the English word *pure* (water) by Hausa speakers. Here, the researchers realised that *piyo* (pure) or *puwa* (water) is a borrowed word from English. This is because it has been

adapted in Hausa, and there is no gainsaying that anyone living or visiting the northeastern Nigeria, especially Borno State will hear these words commonly and widely used both by children selling water and people who need it to use, in all works of life, especially at the market and travel stations. There is also tendency by the speakers to

maintain strong vowels where the weak one (/ə/) is used in RP, in such words as *sal/a/ry* and *passindj/a/*. It can be deduced that speakers may have little mastery of Vowel Reduction Rule whereby strong vowels become weak in unstressed word position.

5.1 Consonant substitution

In connection with consonant substitution, one word was recorded, namely the RP /r/, which replaced by the lateral /l/ in the word *radiator* realised as *ladiator*

6. Vowel epenthesis

Ladefoged and Johnson (2010: 306) define *epenthesis* as “the insertion of one or more sounds in the middle of a word”. Richards & Schmidt (2010:199), on their part, opine that *epenthesis* is “the addition of a sound at the beginning of a word or between sounds”. Vowel epenthesis therefore refers to the insertion of a vowel either at the beginning of a word or between sounds. This phonological phenomenon is noticeable in the English loanwords in Hausa, as illustrated in table II below:

Table II: Vowel epenthesis

Hausa speech embedding English borrowed/switched words	Meaning of the utterance in English	Epenthesis vowel	Consonant clusters broken up
<u>Akwai purobule</u> m	There is <u>a</u> problem	/u/, /u/	pr, bl
lamba direba	The driver's number	/i/	dr
<u>safiyan</u> taya <u>daya</u>	A spare <u>tyre</u>	/i/	Py
Bilessin ne	Blessing	/i/	Bl
gilas ne shine so	Yes, it is the (a) car glass	/i/	Gl
Batiri ya nada garanti	The (car) battery is reliable	/i/	Tr
For exam <u>p</u> l	For example	/u/	Pl
Bani di <u>r</u> eba guda daya	Put a driver at my disposal	/i/,	dr

As shown in table II above, the vowel epenthesis includes using /i/, /u/ and /e/ in places where they do not exist in English. There are 8 cases of middle epenthesis, including in *safiya* (*spare*) *taya daya* (one spare tyre), including b/i/lessin (blessing), in which the front vowel /i/ was inserted between /b/ and /l/, g/i/las (glass), where the same vowel breaks the consonant cluster 'gl'; and d/i/reba (driver) which undergoes the insertion /i/ in-between the alveolar /d/ and the roll /r/.

Similarly, the rounded vowel /u/ has also split the consonant cluster 'pl' in *examp/u/l* (for example). It is also doubly inserted in the word *problem*, realized as p/**u**/rob/**u**/lem by in the Hausa speech. From these findings, it can be deduced that some (native) Hausa speakers insert vowels between consonant clusters in English words, while switching from Hausa to English or in English loanwords. This phonological phenomenon, which is not restricted only to Hausa speakers, could also be noticeable with speakers of other English varieties in Africa like Zibabwean, Kenyan, Ghanaian, etc. One may be tempted to conclude that English consonant clusters are unfamiliar to Hausa speakers because they may not exist in many local or indigenous languages, which may probably

account for vowel epenthesis phenomenon in English loanwords.

The above claim confirms Alqhatani and Musa (2024)'s observation that vowel epenthesis is inserted in "hausanised" words from Arabic and English to simplify complex onsets and codas to conform to the borrowing language phonological constraints. This view is also supported by Kager (1999) and Kadenge (2012), who note that the clustered sequences in Hausa receive vowels as a result of undominated markedness of syllable constraints, which prohibits a sequence of consonants at the onset position. However, formally educated Hausa-English bilingual speakers are assumed to be aware of vowel epenthesis while switching from Hausa to English. Thus, they may do it consciously. However, other uneducated Hausa speakers may not know the Hausa adapted English loanwords in their Hausa speech.

7. Grammatico-phonological inflections of English borrowing in Hausa speech

Data analysis reveals that the realization of English words in Hausa speech undergoes some grammatical or

phonological final inflections, namely the letter 'n', attached to the borrowed word. Such an attachment, according to speakers, indicates precision. *gidan ne* means 'this house', while 'gida' is 'house'. Example (1) illustrates this phenomenon, as can be seen hereunder:

(1)

a- **tayan** *ne*: this/that tyre

b- **tashan** Bama: Bama's travel agency/station

c- *ya gani motan ai*: I have seen this car

d- **motan can na**: that is the car

e- **safiyan taya** *daya*: one spare tyre

In (a) above, the English word 'tyre', which was adapted as *taya*, received a final nasal sound /n/, which nasalises the preceding vowel /a/, indicating precision of the object alluded to (tyre), through the use the demonstrative pronoun 'this'/'that'. Likewise, in (b), the English word 'station', which was "hausanised" as *tasha*, inflected with a final /n/ to become *tashan* as in *tashan Bama* (Bama' travel station), where the idea of

precision is portrayed by Bama, the name of a locality in Borno State, Nigeria. In (c), the final /n/ brought precision on the car (*motan*) alluded to in 'na gani motan ai' (I have seen this car), whereby both the speaker and the interlocutor know the car they were talking about; and the same Hausa loanword plays a similar role in (d), which is *motan can na* (that is the car), where the attached final nasal conveys precision on the car the interlocutors were talking about, via the demonstrative 'that'. In (e), the nasal also brought precision and shared knowledge on the tyre referred to in *safiyan taya daya* (one spare tyre).

8. Diphthongs monophthogisation and vowel lengthening

Hausa speakers systematically monophthongised diphthongs embedded in English borrowed words or switched words. This is shown in example (2) below:

(2)

- a- *Baa local wannan*: there is no local
- b- *Ka nada sola*: you have solar panel
- c- *Ya nada rollin*: he has a gradual (plan)
- d- *Ya nada sola*: he has a solar panel
- e- *Magani Islamic*: Islamic/spiritual medicine

In all the examples above, from (2a) to (2d), Hausa-speaking informants systematically monophthongized the diphthongs embedded in the English loanwords or borrowing in Hausa speech. In (b & d), (a) and (c), the RP diphthong /əʊ/ represented by the grapheme 'o', was commonly monophthongised and lengthened as /ɔ:/, a back rounded vowel, yielding l/ɔ:/cal, s/ɔ:/la and r/ɔ:/llin, respectively. This could be as a result of the speakers' L1 or Hausa interference. In (2e), the monophthong /æ/ was lengthened as /ɑ:/ in *is/ɑ:/mic*.

10. Sound elision

Elision refers to the deletion of a sound or syllable from a word. Bussmann (1996: 335-6) points out that in phonetics

and phonology, there is usually a "loss of a vowel, consonant or syllable". This phenomenon is found in some English loanwords in Hausa, as shown in example (3) below:

(3)

English words	English loanwords in Hausa	sound deleted
---------------	----------------------------	---------------

- | | | |
|---------------------------|--------|---------------------------------------|
| a- Cameroon | na | |
| kamarun | ko | |
| /n/ | | (it belongs to Cameroon, doesn't it?) |
| b- Last year in October | las | |
| sia | octoba | |
| /t/ | | |
| c- There is a post office | | |
| akwai | pos | zofis |
| /t/ | | |

As shown in (3) above, the nasal /n/ was deleted in *Kamaru* (Cameroon) and the voiceless alveolar /t/ in *las sia octoba* (last year) and in *akoy pos zofis* (post office). The omission of the sounds could be considered as a way of simplifying the realisation of the English lexemes in Hausa. This therefore goes in line with Thomason's (2001) observation that a letter is lost or replaced

within the borrowed words to conform to the phonological structure of the recipient language.

10. Sound addition

This is the insertion of a (final) vowel sound in the English borrowed words in Hausa speech. This is shown in example (4) below

(4)

a- akwai tchandji: there is change

b- ka na tiboyi ne: are you a motor boy?

In both (4a) and (4b), the front vowel /i/ is attached to the English loanwords. The pronunciation of the English loanwords has been “hausanised” – the morpho-phonological system of English, the source language, has been mapped onto the phonological grammar of Hausa, the borrowing language.

11. Conclusion

This paper has examined the morpho-phonological adaptation of English loanwords and code-switching in Hausa in the northern and north-eastern part of Nigeria. Participant

observation was used as a tool for data collection. Analysis of data reveals that the morpho-phonological features of English loanwords and code-switching in Hausa occurs through such features as vowel epenthesis, vowel addition, and vowel and consonant substitution, sound addition and elision and monophthongisation as well as lengthening of English diphthongs and grammatico-phonological inflections of English borrowings in Hausa. It has therefore been found that the structure of the English loanwords and code-switching has undergone a sort of ‘linguistic violence’ in order to comply with the patterns or system of Hausa phonology and morphology. These borrowed and switched lexemes have therefore been indigenized by speakers of Hausa.

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