

FURTHER LIGHT ON THE DOMESTICATION OF THE ARABIC LEXICAL ITEMS IN YORUBA LANGUAGE

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Abstract

Locating the specific origin of the Yoruba people has remained a contentious issue, which continually engages the attention of historians. Acute dearth of early written records about the origin of this race paved way for controversial narratives. Sequel to this, discussion about the origin of the Yoruba remained outside the scope of this study. The study examines the reality of contacts between Arabic and Yoruba languages. It established the fact that Yoruba is one of the indigenous African languages that have been enriched by a good number of Arabic loanwords. These words were discovered through sampling and critical review of the usage of the two languages involved by these researchers, who are Yoruba-speaking specialists in Arabic studies. The study discovers that apart from English and Hausa languages, Yoruba has highly been enriched by Arabic. Specific factors that could account for the penetration of these items into Yoruba language were considered. Processes of domestication and instances of usage of the words in Yoruba are substantially discussed.

Keywords; Arabic, Yoruba, Languages, Socio-linguistics, Loanwords

Introduction

The Arabic language plays a vital role in Nigeria. It is the *linguafranca* of Islam. It is an international language which facilitates easy contact between Nigeria and the international communities with which Nigeria shares social, economic and political affinities. The language has enriched some indigenous languages such as Hausa and Yoruba with a good number of lexical items.

Yoruba is a language that has borrowed and domesticated a good number of lexical items from so many languages including Arabic, Hausa and English. Hausa borrowings in Yoruba could probably be the consequence of proximity, commercial activities and Islamic proselytising between the two tribes of Hausa and Yoruba. On the penetration of Arabic into Yoruba language, efforts have been made to discover the specific factors responsible for this. Some of the probable factors will be reviewed briefly in this study while it will concentrate on the provision of a checklist of the loan words discovered so far.

The study will help us to know that languages are rarely sufficient unto themselves and the necessity of intercourse brings the speakers of one language into direct or indirect contact with the speakers of another language. It intends to establish the presence of Arabic lexical items in Yoruba language, and provide the processes of domestication of these words in Yoruba language.

The Concept of Inter-lingual Borrowing

Ojo¹ notes that one of the most important characteristics of language is its dynamic nature. Its ability to create, resurrect and convert words are parts of its characteristics. In fact, linguists, psychologists and great thinkers have held the opinion that it is particularly the creative nature of human language that significantly marks human beings from animals. Borrowing is a very important source of developing the vocabularies and terminologies of a language².

Chomsky and Halle agree with the stated characteristics of human language when they submit that:

The essential difference between man and animal is exhibited most clearly by human language, in particular, by man's ability to form new statements,

which express new thoughts and which, are appropriate to new situation³.

Over ages, language continues to grow such that it can reflect the entire state of the society at any point in time. Among others, one of the devices employed to ensure language growth is the formation of new words through borrowing. Weinreich⁴ is of the view that borrowing is a natural linguistic development. It will continue to be as there are no clear-cut language borders or mutually exclusive language territories.

In his own submission, Ajolore⁵ observes that “all linguistic borrowing presupposes language contact”. What Ajolore sees as contact may occur through language co-terminology, religious, political domination of one language group by another, cultural transfusion, imitation, adoption or importation or through commercial and trade relationship. Ajolore states that;

Theoretically, borrowing is not a linguistic necessity because when faced with new linguistic challenge, speakers of any language can turn to the previously learned patterns of their language for solutions especially where the concepts, ideas, places and people are foreign⁶.

Furthermore, Sapir has argued that:

Languages like cultures are rarely sufficient into themselves. The necessity of intercourse brings the speakers of one language into direct or indirect contact with those of neighbouring or culturally dominant languages. The intercourse may be friendly or hostile. It may move on the humdrum plane of business and trade relations or it may consist of borrowing or interchange of spiritual goods-art, science, religion... The simplest influence that one language may exert on another is the borrowing of words. When there is cultural borrowing, there is always the likelihood that the associated words may be borrowed too⁷.

From the above quotation, it is deductible that language contact is real and that the contact enhances interlingual borrowing.

Approaches to Interlingual Borrowing

Researchers of linguistic studies have clearly identified and classified the approaches to interlingual borrowing differently in this study. These are:

(i) Loan Translation or Importation

Loan translation or importation as a term indicates the adoption of the donor's word for the objects, things, people, places, ideas, notion and concepts, which in form and more or less in phonology are usually like the model. According to Salami, "how phonologically close to the model a replica can be, depends partly on the stage of the word or pattern's development and integration with the recipient language"⁸.

Weinreich⁹ equally remarks, "loan translation/importation refers to a situation where the model is reproduced exactly, element by element. Writing in the same vein, Ajolore¹⁰ notes that "if a replica is so successfully produced that a native speaker of the model can recognize it as his own, loan translation/importation has taken place.

Salami¹¹ argues further that a "three-point scale can be introduced in the phonology of loan words". He states that there may be complete or partial or no phonological resemblance between the model and the replica; e.g.

Complete:	<i>/riba/Yoruba</i> <i>/sura/Yoruba</i>	<i>/ribā/Arabic</i> <i>/sūrah/Arabic</i>
Partial:	<i>/keferi/Yoruba</i> <i>/wolii/Yoruba</i>	<i>/kāfir/Arabic</i> <i>/waliyy/Arabic</i>
No phonological resemblance	<i>/ankali/Yoruba</i>	<i>/‘aql/Arabic</i>

(ii) Loan Shift or Substitution

Scholars like Salami¹² Ajolore¹³ and Weinreich¹⁴ have observed that a borrower may choose not to accept the donor's names along with the things, notions or ideas. He may choose to adopt or substitute materials existing in his own language. Often, however the names he adopts or substitutes will be patterned along the donor's usage or they may show a kind of unconscious translation or even a description of certain physical qualities. This results in

loan shift since the recipient language is using its own phonological resources, the question of model resemblance is not relevant.

(iii) Loan Blend

Weinreich¹⁵ describes loan blend as a term which applies to new “coinages which are stimulated not by cultural innovations but by the need to match designations available in a language in contact. According to Salami¹⁶, “loan blend is a combination of loan importation and loan substitution” i.e. a situation where one part of the pattern is taken from the donor language and the other from one’s language.

Salami¹⁷ observes further that as applicable in loan importation, what results from the combination of loan importation and loan substitution may have complete partial or no phonological resemblance with the model. This is not applicable to Arabic loan words in Yoruba language.

Reasons for Interlingual Borrowing

Linguists have attempted to find answers to why interlingual borrowing occurs. Weinreich¹⁸ identifies “the need to designate new things, persons, places and concepts which were not available for one’s environment as one of the necessities for interlingual borrowing”. Giving similar submission to that of Weinreich, Salami¹⁹ argues that Yoruba belongs to the languages, which fit into this situation. Scientific and technological ideas, items of clothing and jewelry; political, cultural and ideological concepts and their names impinge on Yoruba daily from English, French, Arabic, Hausa and Russian. According to Salami²⁰, the Yoruba people want to know these new things and people; they want to become part of the larger world that shares a common language in certain disciplines, and so they decide to learn the names of these things. Consequently, a good many new words in the language are adopted in order to fulfill certain needs.

Another reason for borrowing is prestige. Where the knowledge of any particular language carries prestige, there will be frequent occasions for borrowing lexical items from such language. As noted by Salami,²¹ “this is probably why there is so much use of English lexical in Yoruba conversations, especially among social climbers”.

Hockett identifies three forms of borrowing traceable to the prestige motive as follows;

A people will borrow because they admire the donor language or its speakers. Or they will borrow not because they admire but because they want to be identified with those who speak it and so attract the same recognition. They may borrow to conform to the majority who sprinkle their speech with foreign lexical items²².

The Yoruba People of Southwestern Nigeria

The submissions of some renowned historians on the origin of the Yoruba people have been reviewed in some previous studies²³. We shall avoid a detailed repetition of the narratives here to avoid digression from the main thrust of this study. However, it is apposite to submit that the main Yorubaland is situated in the Southwestern part of Nigeria. The name Yoruba refers to a linguistic group numbering millions, which occupies a large area extending through the Kwara, Kogi, Lagos, Oyo, Ondo, Osun, Ekiti and Ogun States of the Federation of Nigeria and Republics of Benin and Togo²⁴.

It is significant to note that not all Yoruba speaking people are so known in their places outside Nigeria. They are identified as *Anago* in Benin Republic and Brazil. In Sierra-Leone, they are known as *Aku* and in Cuba, they are known as *Lucumi* which is corrupt form of Yoruba noun-phrase *Oluku mi ni* (he is my friend)²⁵.

The Penetration of Arabic into Yoruba Language

One of the characteristics of a living language is that, it must reflect the changes in the culture and life of its speakers in order to keep pace linguistically, with the different development of modern life in social and religious matters, in commerce and industry, science and technology. As noted by Salami, in order to fulfill this vital function, a language must among other things extend its vocabulary by employing to greater extent the following three methods:

- (i) creation of new words out of its morphemic and phonemic resources;
- (ii) extension of the use of words already in its vocabulary; and
- (iii) borrowing words from other languages²⁶.

The Yoruba language has employed the last method of borrowing words from other languages with which its speakers have had appreciable contact far more than the other two methods. Aromolaran and Mustapha²⁷ have observed that “notable among the language from which Yoruba has borrowed words are Arabic, Hausa and English.” Abdul²⁸ claims that “many words of Arabic origin exist in Yoruba language”. Abdul seems to be supporting the submission of Hunwick which goes thus:

Yoruba and Twi have absorbed words originally of Arabic origin, the borrowings are usually terms of trade and commerce, military terms, economic and political terms and words connected with reading and writing, all of which readily illustrate the roles which Muslims have played in different areas in West Africa²⁹.

Malik agrees with the observation of the two scholars when he submits that: Arabic has enriched some indigenous African languages with hundreds of religious, political and commercial words and expressions... Yoruba also has many Arabic loans words (which are) commonly used in Yoruba classical poetry as well as in Yoruba radio and television programmes³⁰.

Malik remarks further that:

The range of Arabic loan words in Yoruba reveals the impact which this language has made on the linguistic and cultural life of the Yoruba people. When Arabic came into contact with Yoruba through Islam, the encounter was not intensive enough to enable the former to supersede the latter, but it was effective enough to lend a great deal of Arabic vocabulary to it³¹.

There have been divergent opinions on the probable cause of penetration of Arabic into Yoruba language. Salami³² asserts that unique position of the British who ruled, for almost a century, over Nigeria, of which Yorubaland is a part, has justified the influence which English language has had and continue to have on Yoruba. English was the language of the colonialists who ruled Nigeria until 1960 and the language is Nigeria’s official language to date. No political link existed in the past

between the Arabs and the Yoruba, so politics as a means of linguistic and cultural exchanges has no relevance to Arabic/Yoruba case.

Meanwhile, some trade related terms are observed in the borrowings and it is probably on this that Abdul stresses that:

There may have been a cross-culture of the two communities that is, that Arabs and the Yoruba which may have occurred as a result of trade contact... There have been stories about and reports of Yoruba-speaking settlements along the trade routes from Bornu to Khartoum in the Sudan... The early trade across the Sahara connects North-African countries with Northern Nigerian³³

Attempting to point to a specific period when Arabic actually came to Yorubaland, Gbadamosi³⁴ asserts that the date of entry of Islam and Arabic to Yorubaland cannot be precisely fixed. However, historical records show that there were Muslims in Yorubaland in the 17th century. Gbadamosi argues further that prior to this period, Yorubaland had contact with the already Islamized areas, especially those to the north-west Yorubaland through the activities of settlers and traders. Furthermore, AbdulAzeez states that ‘this trade connection’ between the Arabs and the people of West Africa was the first trace of Arabic language in Nigeria’³⁵.

The borrowings are dominated by religious and ritual terms and as noted by Hunwick, this readily illustrates the roles that Muslims have played in different areas in West Africa.³⁶ Ogunbiyi³⁷ agrees with Hunwick³⁸ when he submits that consequent upon the advent of Islam in Yorubaland and the factors of contacts with other Muslim people such as their Hausa neighbours as well as the systematic Islamic education often associated with the process of Islamization, a considerable amount of words, terminologies and expression found their way into Yoruba language.

Another probable way given prominence is that of migration. According to Nwabara and Osae³⁹, “the Yoruba claim that their ancestors entered Nigeria after migration from North or North East”. Some of the traditions specifically point to Makkah as the home of origin but it is suspected that this is due to Islamic influence.

Buah equally observes that:

The name of the much-revered legendary ancestral hero of the Yoruba is Oduduwa. He is portrayed in several variants of the legend as Eastern prince who, driven out of his

kingdom in the East, finally entered Nigeria after a long match with his follower and they finally settled down at 'Ile-Ife.'⁴⁰

However, Stride and Ifeka⁴¹ have noted that, "Yoruba origins are so shrouded in antiquity that all traditions relating to its early growth are strongly tinged with legend and obscurity". Whichever way the Arabs and the Yoruba have made their contact, what is certain is that a large number of Arabic words exist in Yoruba.

A Checklist of Some Arabic Loan Words in Yoruba Language

Gbadamosi⁴² provides a list of fifty-five (55) lexical items borrowed from Arabic in Yoruba. In his own submission, Abdul⁴³ identifies forty-eight (48) lexical items, Malik⁴⁴ points to fifty-five (55) items while Folorunsho⁴⁵ provides us with some seventy-eight (78) borrowings. A total of one hundred (100) lexical items have been identified and analysed by Folorunsho⁴⁶ in a more recent study. The tempo of discovery of the borrowings increases as recent researches expose more of them.

So extensive are the borrowings from Arabic to Yoruba that they are found treated as original Yoruba expressions in Yoruba dictionary such as Abraham, R.C. (Ed) (1958) *Dictionary of Modern Yoruba*, London: University of London Press and *A Dictionary of Yoruba Language* published by Oxford University Press of London in 1950. Furthermore, Samuel Ajayi Crowther remains one of the earliest native pioneers of Yoruba studies. The translation of the Bible to Yoruba language undertaken by him is one of the earliest literary works in Yoruba language and the fact that Arabic borrowed items are freely used in the scripture confirms the extent to which Arabic has enriched Yoruba.⁴⁷ According to Omofoyewa,⁴⁸ samples also abound in Yoruba literature texts which attest to enormous amount of Arabic loan words and expressions in Yoruba language. Most, if not all of these domesticated borrowings, occur so frequently in the daily speech and conversation of the Yoruba people that none but the language specialist especially the one with sound background in Arabic is aware of their being words of non-native stock.

Degree of Domestication of the Arabic Words Borrowed into Yoruba

It is an undisputable fact that a large number of native Yoruba speakers are now multi-lingual, that is, they speak Yoruba which is their native language and in this process, they make use of a number of borrowed lexical items from English, Arabic and some local neighbouring languages, wittingly or unwittingly. In the course of investigation of the competence of Yoruba native-speakers in the lexical items, three groups were sampled. The three groups were Christians, non-Arabic-proficient Muslims and Arabic-proficient Muslim native speakers of Yoruba language. An analysis of the results of the test of competence conducted on the three groups revealed that there is no significant difference among the three groups in terms of proficiency in the borrowed lexical items.⁴⁹ Writing on English loan words in Yoruba but stating what could be of relevance to the Arabic lexical items, Salami⁵⁰ cautions that such borrowings, particularly where they have been assimilated into the language, as in the example above, should be regarded not as counterfeit additions to the language but as legitimate Yoruba words.

Fully domesticated Arabic lexical items in Yoruba are generally so transformed from their original Arabic forms that they are often not only unrecognizable as Arabic words but also indistinguishable from native words. They have been so fully domesticated in Yoruba that they are hardly identified except by bilinguals. This may be illustrated from the following Arabic lexical items.

Arabic source (Transliteration)	Yoruba	Meaning (English)
<i>riba</i>	<i>riba</i>	usury
<i>sa'ah</i>	<i>saa</i>	period
<i>sabab</i>	<i>sababi</i>	reason
<i>sura</i>	<i>sura</i>	appearance

Partially domesticated Arabic lexical items in Yoruba exhibit some phonological features which change them a bit from their sources as a result of the phonological structure of the Yoruba language. Ajolore⁵¹ has noted that Yoruba has partially succeeded in imposing its musical patterns on borrowed lexical items. However, the change is not so significant, as the items are still recognizable as Arabic words in spite of the factors responsible for such change. Some of such factors rendering Arabic items partially assimilated in Yoruba include:

a) Plosive Sounds:

The pharyngealised dental-alveolar plosives /t/ and /d/ as well as the uvula plosive /q/ are not found in Yoruba. In the Arabic loan words where these sounds occur, /t/, /d/ or /l/ and /k/ are substituted for them respectively.

Thus;

<i>Tifl</i> becomes <i>tufulu</i>	(baby)
<i>darur(ah)</i> becomes <i>laluri</i>	(necessity)
<i>qadar</i> becomes <i>kadara</i>	(fate)

The glottal stop /'a/ is not present in Yoruba. It is therefore dropped in the Arabic loan words as in the following;

<i>'ad-du 'ā</i> becomes <i>adua</i>	(prayer)
<i>'al- 'amr</i> becomes <i>alamori</i>	(matter)
<i>samā</i> becomes <i>sanmo</i>	(sky)

b) Fricative Sounds

The dental fricative /th/ as well as the pharyngealised dental fricative /z/ are not found in Yoruba. The phonemes /t/ and /s/ are substituted for these sounds respectively. Thus;

<i>'ath-thulathā</i> becomes <i>atalata</i>	(Tuesday)
<i>wa 'z</i> becomes <i>waasu</i>	(Sermon)

Yoruba does not have the velar fricative /kh/ as well as the pharyngeal fricative /h/ and /c/. In the Arabic loan words, these sounds are completely ignored. Thus;

<i>'al-khamīs</i> becomes <i>alamisi</i>	(Thursday)
<i>'al-khabar</i> becomes <i>labare</i>	(News)
<i>'al- 'āfiyah</i> becomes <i>alaafia</i>	(Health)
<i>sā 'ah</i> becomes <i>saa</i>	(Period)

c) Clusters

Abdul⁵² observes that there are no consonant clusters in Yoruba. Owing to the essentially Consonant-Vowel structure of Yoruba syllables, consonant clusters, whether medial or final in a syllable, are not found in the language. Structural changes in the Arabic loan words are therefore caused by a tendency to either drop one of the consonant or insert vowel sounds

between the Arabic consonant clusters in order to conform to the syllabic pattern of Yoruba. For instance;

<i>fakhr</i> becomes <i>faari</i>	(Pride)
<i>waqt</i> becomes <i>wakati</i>	(Hour)
<i>fitnah</i> becomes <i>fitina</i>	(Trouble)
<i>'ar-rizq</i> becomes <i>arisiki</i>	(Wealth)
<i>'al-'amr</i> becomes <i>alamori</i>	(Matter)
<i>'al-barakah</i> becomes <i>alubarika</i>	(Blessing)

d) Nasalisation

Nasalization of the preceding vowel on the occurrence of a cluster of the consonants /m/ or /n/⁵³. Thus;

<i>'al-jinn</i> becomes <i>alujonu</i>	(Jinn)
<i>'al-jannah</i> becomes <i>alujonna</i>	(Paradise)

e) Substitution of Diphthongs with Oral Vowels

Where diphthongs /ay/ and /aw/ occur in Arabic, they are rendered in Yoruba not as diphthongs but are equated to the oral vowels /e/ and /o/ respectively. For instance:

<i>Sulayman</i> becomes <i>Sulemona</i>	(Name)
<i>'al-'ayb</i> becomes <i>aleebu</i>	(Defect)
<i>Maymunah</i> becomes <i>Memuna</i>	(Name)
<i>Zubayr</i> becomes <i>Suberu</i>	(Name)

f) Dropping of Certain Letters

Certain letters are dropped in Arabic loan words without provision for the replacement in Yoruba language as in the following:

<i>'al-harīr</i> becomes <i>alaari</i>	(Silk)
<i>'ar-ra'd</i> becomes <i>aara</i>	(Thunder)
<i>'al-qamh</i> becomes <i>alikama</i>	(Wheat)

Few Instances of Usage of the Words in Yoruba Language

- (1) *Olori ilee wa ni ki awon akekoo mu ere idaraya nii baada gege bi won se mu eko won nii baada*. Meaning: Our head of state appealed to students to take sports seriously just as they take their studies seriously. (Arabic *'ibādah* – act of devotion)⁵⁴

- (2) *E ye gbariba, e yee je haramu*. Meaning: Stop taking bribe, stop engaging in an illegal act. (Arabic: *ribā*-usury, bribe-*haram*-illegal act)⁵⁵
- (3) *Jesu pade won, o wipe alaafia* (Matt. 28:9, Samueli 3:21 and Iwe Owe, 17:1) Meaning: Jesus met them and said: hail (Arabic: 'al- 'āfiyah-well-being).
- (4) *Gboadua mi Oluwa*. Orin Dafidi, 10:1 and 142:8) Meaning: Hear my prayer O Lord! (Arabic: 'ad-duā'-prayer)
- (5) *Bi ati koo ninu iwe Wooli Isaiah* (Mark 1:2). Meaning: As it is written in the book of Isaiah the saint. (Arabic: *wali*: saint, Holy man)
- (6) *Mo f'era alubosa*. Meaning: I want to buy an onion. (Arabic: 'al-basal-onion)
- (7) *Kinni sababi aiwa si ipade re lana* ?Meaning: What caused your absence from the meeting yesterday? (Arabic: *sabab*-cause, reason).
- (8) *Mo n gbowaasu lori iredio*. Meaning: I am listening to sermon on the radio. (Arabic: *wa 'z*-sermon, admonition).

Conclusion

From the discussion so far, it has been discovered that, languages have no clear-cut borders or mutually exclusive territories as they are rarely sufficient unto themselves. The necessity of inter-course leads to borrowing. The contact may occur through language co-terminology, religions, political domination, cultural transfusion, imitation, adoption or imitation or through commercial and trade relationships.

The borrowings have undergone phonological and structural changes, so much that, in some cases, it would only be identified by the expert in the field of Arabic and Islamic studies. The borrowings have been completely subsumed into the Yoruba structure and have been used by every Yoruba irrespective of creed or deed. The Yoruba in Diaspora are not excluded. This underscores the length and breadth of assimilation. Most of the writings on borrowings in Yoruba language lay more emphasis on borrowings from English language and downplay or ignore the large corpus of borrowings from Arabic language. This may be due to lack of pre-requisite skill to identify these words or total mischief. The analysis above highlights

the extent and various dimensions of the Arabic borrowings in Yoruba language.

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