

## **MORPHO-PHONEMICS OF IGEDE BORROWED WORDS**

By

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### **Abstract**

This paper investigates the morpho-phonemic changes that occur in Igede borrowed words. The paper adopts the borrowing transfer theory of Terence Odlin (1989). Data for the study were collected from primary and secondary sources, particularly oral interviews with elderly speakers and Igede-English bilinguals. The Igede people of Oju and Obi Local Government Areas of Benue State made the study area. The findings reveal that Igede borrow words from English, Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo languages. The findings add that the channels of entry of such words into Igede are through religion, trade and commerce, government and administration, early education and colonial influence, technological advancement and need for inter cultural interaction. Findings show that borrowed words in Igede undergo both phonological and morphological changes in the language. The phonological changes include vowel insertion (epenthesis), consonant substitution, and simplification of consonant clusters; while the

morphological modifications include; affixation patterning such as prefixation, prefixation-suffixation and zero morpheme changes. The findings further reveal that lexical borrowing does not threaten the language; rather it enriches the word stock, and also fills the lexical gaps especially for concepts that did not originally exist in Igede language and culture. The paper concludes that borrowing is a morphological process which should be accepted by most languages because it strengthens the recipient language allowing for language growth and development.

**Keywords: Language, morphology, morpho-phonemics, lexical borrowing, and sources of lexical borrowing.**

## **Introduction**

The idea and notion of human supremacy in the animal kingdom is often linked to the unique and distinct capabilities that stand humans out from other animals, particularly with respect to cognition and communication. One of the most significant aspects of this is language. The supremacy of humans via language is also corroborated by Townsend and Leroux (2021) Krings, Kristof and Salmen (2021) and Burkart (2021) who all submit that the supremacy of humans in the animal kingdom is closely tied to humans' unique use of complex system of communication known as language, which has allowed humans to dominate the planet in ways that no other species have.

To buttress this, human language is not only more intricate in terms of vocabulary and syntax compared to the communication systems of other animals but also enables abstract thinking, cooperation and the transmission of knowledge across generations. Through this medium, humans live, interact and carry out linguistic exchange. Linguistic exchange such as language contact opens a doorway for borrowing. Borrowing is a universal linguistic phenomenon where one language adopts words, phrases or grammatical structures from another. It occurs across most languages and reflects the constant interaction between close language communities. The Igede language is not an exception to language borrowing. Igede, like other languages in the Middle Belt of Nigeria, is subject to the linguistic contact phenomenon of borrowing and this is due to its cultural and linguistic interactions.

The Igede language belongs to the Kwa subgroup of the larger Niger-Congo family and is primarily spoken in the Oju and Obi Local Government Areas of Benue State. With an estimated population of over 461,000 speakers, as the 2020 Ethnologue data attested. Enyi (2023:vii) adds that Igede is classified as one of the languages spoken in Benue State. No community is an island that can live without having contact with other communities around it. It is through this contact that communities influence one another at various levels; linguistically, culturally and socially and in some cases religiously.

Linguistically, the contact Igede language had with other linguistic communities has resulted into lexical exchange and borrowing. Borrowing can be seen as a natural outcome of language interaction, but it can also be an indicative of power relations, where the dominant language exerts linguistic influence over a minority language. This paper intends to critically investigate the morpho-phonemics of Igede borrowed words.

This paper is motivated by the fact that the Igede language, like many minority languages in Nigeria, has over the years borrowed words from various languages, including English, Hausa, and other Nigerian languages. However, the phonological changes that occur when these words are adapted into Igede pose a problem in understanding how these changes reflect the unique morpho-phonemic patterns of the Igede language. Specifically, it is unclear how the phonological changes in borrowed words, such as sound substitution, sound addition and deletion relate to both sound and word structure system of Igede. Therefore, there is a need to investigate how the phonological changes in Igede borrowed words.

### **Aim and Objectives**

The aim of this study is to investigate the morpho-phonemic changes that occur in Igede borrowed words. The objectives are to;

1. identify the primary language, sources and channels from which Igede borrow words from.
2. find out the phonological and morphological changes that occur in Igede borrowed words.

3. investigate whether lexical borrowing poses a threat to or enriches the Igede language.

## **Literature Review**

### **Morphology and Morpho-phonemics**

In linguistics, morphology is the study of the structure and formation of words. It deals with the internal structure of words and how they are formed from smaller meaningful units called morphemes. Nwankwegwu (2013) holds that morphology is derived from the Greek word *morh * and also the German word *Formencehre* meaning the study of forms as borrowed into linguistics in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and is concerned with forms of words for different uses and grammatical constructions.

The term morphology, Kari (2015:1-2) admits, is not peculiar to linguistics. It has had many applications in several fields of study comprising Biology - the study of the form and structure of organisms, as well as Geology - the study of configuration and evolution of land forms, to mention a few. Focusing on linguistics as a discipline, morphology is differently defined by different linguists. O'Grady, Archibald, and Katamba (2011:116), similarly define morphology as "the part of grammar that is concerned with words and word formation". Analytically based on the above, these definitions reflect an indubitably close-knitted convergence in their interpretative approach and concerns about the morphological enterprise being the investigation of "word forms" in different uses and constructions.

Morpho-phonemics on the other hand, is the study of the relationship between the sound system and the grammatical structure of a language. It examines how the sounds of a language change or vary in different grammatical contexts, such as when words are inflected or combined to form new words. This field of study looks at how the sounds of a language are affected by the language's grammatical structure, and how these sound changes contribute to the overall meaning of words and phrases.

## **Morphological Processes**

A morphological process is a means of changing a stem to adjust its meaning to fit its syntactic and communication context. In other words, morphological processes function to make one word or inflection distinct from another. Unubi, Abraham and Yusuf (2017:426) see morphological processes as “different ways of building words; the two principal ones being inflection and derivation”. Morphological processes in short are cover term for processes in which morphological meaning can be associated with segmentable parts of words in languages.

### **Borrowing**

Orban, Sokpo, Shittu and Udu (2020) posit that lexical borrowing has been an interest to various linguists such as Whitney 1875, De Saussure 1915, Sapir 1921, Pedersen 1931, Haugen 1950, Hockett 1979, Anttila 1989 and Hockett (1958). Piotr (2019) submit that “borrowing is a natural consequence of language contact, and it can provide valuable insights into the linguistic and cultural exchange between different communities”. The language from which words are adopted is often referred to as the “source”, “lending” or “donor” language while the language into which those words are adopted is labeled “recipient” or “receptor” language.

Borrowing is a word formation process, a morphological process that involves taking words from one or more languages to fit into the vocabulary of another. Borrowing is one of the commonest ways of creating new words in human language. Borrowing is a linguistic concept which refers to the process through which a language can acquire more items, mostly in the area of vocabulary.

Borrowing is of two types; internal and external borrowing. The internal borrowing refers to when new words or items are formed or created from within the language to accommodate the vocabulary need of the language. External borrowing on the other hand refers to words or items which entered the language and with time become a part of the language. Zhan (2023:24) opines that “loanword is not only an important way of metabolizing vocabulary, but also a crucial approach to the creation and evolution of language and culture.”

Dylewski (2019) also adds that borrowing play an important role in the development and evolution of language. They allow for the expression of new ideas and concepts, and they can also reflect cultural and social changes. Imoh (2012:484) opines that different authors have suggested factors responsible for borrowing. Imoh submits that “fundamentally, a language is motivated to borrow when there is a need to designate new things, persons, places, activate concepts for which a language does not have names or items in its native vocabulary but has made sufficient contact with other languages which have these terms”. He gives the following examples in Bassa that the words satellite, motor, computer have no cognate names in Bassa native vocabulary; hence speakers resort to borrowing and adopting these words.

Another reason for borrowing is the linguistic phenomenon of bilingualism; Clyne (1972) in Coulmas (2004) define the concept as the use of more than one language or competence in more than one language. Borrowing of lexical items across language boundary can be said to be the result of bilingualism on the part of those who do the borrowing. Poplack (2018) further opines that bilinguals’ language use is characterized by code-switching and borrowing, reflecting their linguistic creativity and adaptability. To account for new invention and innovation: Language tends to borrow lexical items from each other to complement the impossibilities of expressions especially where there is simply no other available word. To this end, Radford, Connolly, Davies, Heath and Johnson (1991:225) opined that “perhaps the most obvious reasons is sheer necessity”. People need to develop words for new or unfamiliar concepts, new technology, plants and animals...Concepts for which we lack words”.

Matras, (2019) agree with the above when Matras opine that “language contact often results in borrowing, particularly when speakers encounter new concepts or objects”. This definition stresses the fact that lexical borrowing is a common outcome of language contact, reflecting cultural exchange and linguistic adaptation.

Blank (2019) also support this by adding that “speakers tend to favor borrowing words over creating new ones, as it requires less cognitive effort”. In some societies for example, there are many words, the pronunciation of which is viewed as taboo and prohibited because they are considered inappropriate for usage. In place of these words,

borrowing from other languages is done to cover them up.

Prestige and social value attached to a language: This is another reason for borrowing. When a language is perceived by an individual as being superior to another, such individual regards the superior language as prestigious and tends to borrow from it.

### **Empirical Review**

Adejoh (2020) critically appraised borrowing as a source of linguistic vitality and change in Idoma language. The study's aim was to establish how borrowing is a source of language growth, survival and change within Idoma language. The study adopted the borrowing transfer theory of Terence Odlin in 1989. The study's findings revealed that Idoma as a language does not live in isolation and it is not independent either as such, it has borrowed from languages like Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Igala and most of all English.

Njagi (2016) carried out a research on lexical borrowing and semantic change: A case of English and Gikuyu. The research has as its aim, to determine the mechanisms involved in borrowing. English words retain their original source language meaning or they undergo semantic shift. The data for the study were collected through observation and interaction with native speakers of Gikuyu in everyday conversations. According to the findings, Gikuyu speakers have borrowed and nativised a significant number of words from English.

In conjunction with the above, Olusola (2015) conducted a similar research which examined the differences and similarities in the morphological system of English and Yoruba languages. The research objectives were to know whether there are similarities or differences between English and Yoruba morphological systems and to also know at what level of the language are these differences and similarities noticeable. The study found that, there are differences between English and Yoruba at the morphological level. At the morphological level, there are certain morphological processes that take place in Yoruba noun formation without a corresponding equivalent in English. Adjectives in Yoruba do not mark degree of comparison as observed in English.

## Methodology

The data for the study is collected using both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include; the use of oral interview of older speakers (elders) of the language, bilingual speakers of Igede-English languages, non-participant observation, and the researcher's intuitive knowledge of the language. The secondary sources include textbooks, journals, departmental works and online sources. This data is sourced from Benue State, particularly the Oju and Obi Local Government Area of the State.

## Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the borrowing transfer theory of Terence Odlin in 1989. According to this theory, when languages come into contact, transfer or diffusion of material from one language to another takes place. According to the theory, linguistic features such as vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation can be transferred from one language to another, either consciously or unconsciously, borrowing often occurs through social interactions like trade, education, migration or inter-marriage and is particularly common in bilingual or multilingual communities. The theory emphasizes the borrowing is not limited to word but can affect various levels of language. It provides a useful framework for analyzing how languages changes and interact in multilingual societies.

## Data Presentation and Analysis

**Table I: Examples of Words Borrowed from English into Igede**

S/N	Igede	English	Channel of Entry
1.	Ichochi	Church	Religion
2.	Ihwoto	Photo	Trade and commerce
3.	Ileta	Letter	Education
4.	Itochi	Torchlight	Technology

5.	Ipasto	Pastor	Religion
6.	Ifada	Rev Father	Religion
7.	Ilada	Ladder	Trade
8.	ikiliniki	Clinic	Missionary healthcare
9.	Iwellu	Well	Coinage
10.	Ipumpu	Pump	Technology

**Source: Fieldwork 2025**

**Table II: Technological English Words Borrowed into Igede**

S/N	Igede	English	Channel of Entry
1.	Istov	Stove	Trade
2.	Ikomputa	Computer	Technology through coinage
3.	Ifirigi	fridge	Technology through coinage
4.	Ijenrator	Generator	Technology through coinage
5.	Ifan	fan	Trade and commerce
6.	Ifim	Film	Technology
7.	Idonkita	Doctor	Health
8.	Ichapta	Chapter	Religion

**Source: Fieldwork 2025**

**Table III: Examples of words borrowed from Igbo into Igede**

S/N	Igede	Igbo	Channel of entry	English Equivalent
1.	Ogom	Ogom	Inter-marriage	In-law
2.	Igusi	Egusi	Trade and commerce	Melon
3.	Akpo/akpu	Akpu	Trade and commerce	Fermented cassava food
4.	Abananya	Abananya	Trade and commerce	Inferior goods
5.	Ekpem	Ekpem	Trade and commerce	Bottle
6.	Akpa	Akpa	Trade and commerce	A box of clothes

**Source: Fieldwork 2025**

**Table IV: Names Borrowed from Igbo into Igede**

S/N	Igede	Original Ethic Group	Channel
1.	Ijoma	Igbo	Inter-marriage
2.	Onwu	Igbo	Trade and commerce
3.	Ugwo	Igbo	Inter-marriage
4.	Agocha	Igbo	Inter-marriage

**Source: Fieldwork 2025**

**Table V: Examples of Words Borrowed from Hausa into Igede**

S/N	Igede	Source Language	Channel of Entrance	Word in Hausa	Gloss
1.	Aribacha	Hausa	trade	Albasa	Onion
2.	Ugoro	Hausa	trade	Goro	Kola-nut
3.	Umaala	Hausa	government	Malam	Local secretary
4.	Itoro	Hausa	trade	Toro	3 pence piece
5.	Inunu	Hausa	Trade	Nunu	Cow milk

**Source: Fieldwork 2025**

**Table VII: Examples of Words borrowed from Yoruba into Igede**

Igede	Source	Channel of entrance	Word in Yoruba	Gloss
Akara	Yoruba	Food trade	Akara	Beans cake
Akamu	Yoruba	Food trade	Akamu	Pap
Ọlori-gogoro	Yoruba	Social occasions(clothings)	Ọlori-gogoro	Head tie
Ankara	Yoruba	Clothing	Ankara	A kind of wrapper

**Source: Fieldwork 2025**

### **Data Analysis**

From table one above it can be observed that Igede borrowed heavily from English language. Some of the above words borrowed into Igede

gained entry through the activities of the early missionaries such as the Methodist Mission and the Roman Catholic Mission (RCM) who came to preach the gospel and as a result, words of English found their way into Igede language. Furthermore, due to the influence and dominance of English in many spheres the world over, certain words which had no original native name due to their not been in existence then, are borrowed into Igede language. They includes, technological objects like 'injine' (engine), 'imachini'(machine), and house electronics like "ikomputa (computer), and 'ifan' (fan).

In addition,, Igede language also borrowed from Igbo. Igbo words gained access into Igede through channels of trade and commercial activities. The Igede also borrow from Hausa, this was the time when the Hausas served as intermediaries between the British colonial administrators and the Igede people. This allowed Hausa words such as 'sarki' (market judge), albasa (onion) and 'goro' (kola-nut) to be borrowed into Igede. Also in Yoruba, Igede borrows words directly from the language.The names of the items borrowed are related to food, and clothing. These words are borrowed into the Igede language due to migration and travel of the Igede people to Yoruba lands such as Ibadan, Lagos State respectively.

### **The Morpho-phonemic modifications Borrowed Words Undergo in Igede**

For borrowed words to fit into the morphological structure of the Igede language, such words sometimes undergo both phonological and morphological modifications. The phonological modification in Igede borrowed words includes the below;

#### **Vowel Insertion (Epenthesis)**

Many Igede words end with open syllables (vowel ending), while English ends with consonants in some cases. To adapt these words into Igede's phonological structure, a vowel is often inserted. For the word 'fridge' the consonant cluster /fr/ is broken with an inserted vowel /i/ in Igede and the final /dge/ sound is softened to /gi/ to fit the Igede syllabic structure. Also in the Hausa words borrowed into Igede, there is an introduction of vowel insertion. For instance, the Hausa word 'albasa' ends with an open vowel structure, but the

Igede version introduces an extra vowel /i/ to create 'aribacha. This reflects epenthesis in which an additional vowel is inserted between consonants to ease pronunciation in Igede.

### **Vowel shift and vowel length modification**

In some words borrowed from Igbo into Igede, there is evidence of vowel shift. Words such as 'akpu' in Igbo to akpo in Igede had undergone the vowel shift of /u/ -/o/ at word ending. In the borrowed word in Igede 'abananya' from Igbo's 'abanaya', there is evident of vowel length changes in the Igede borrowed word. While in the Igbo word 'egusi' the Igede borrowed from 'igusi', there is an introduction and insertion of the vowel /i/.

### **Consonant Substitution**

Due to the fact that Igede and English and Igbo and the other languages, Igede borrows from do not have the same consonant sounds, there is bound to be different phonetic inventory, leading to substitutions. For instance the English word 'doctor', the /k/ sound in it is softened to a /t/ sound in Igede while additional syllables are added for ease of pronunciation. Also the consonant cluster /st/ in *istov* (stove) is retained, but the final /e/ is dropped and the vowel /i/ is added at the beginning to make it conform to Igede syllabic structure. Also in Hausa words borrowed into Igede, some consonants are altered in Igede to match the Igede consonant system. The Hausa consonant cluster /im/ in *malam* is modified by inserting a vowel /aa/ and replacing /l/ with /m/, making it easier for pronunciation in Igede as 'umaala'.

### **Morphological Modification of the Borrowed Words**

The morphological modification of borrowed words in Igede reflects affixation patterning. There is evidence of affixation patterns such as prefixation, prefix-suffixation and zero morpheme change. The prefixation can be seen in English-Igede words such "ifilm" (film) ifan (fan), ipasto, and ijenerato. Here the prefix /i/ is added to the noun 'film', 'fan' 'pastor' and 'generator' to conform to Igede noun class system, making it easier to integrate the word morphologically. Morso, in the Hausa word 'goro' (kola nut) when borrowed into Igede, there is initial vowel modification (prefixation) added to /g/ to form

'ugoro' to align with Igede sound system, where open syllables and vowel harmony are more prevalent.

Furthermore, there is evidence of prefix-suffixation in the borrowed words from English. The words fridge realized as ifirigi, computer 'ikomputa, itochi 'torch' reflects this process. The addition of prefix /i/ and suffix -/gi/ at the end of fridge makes the word more nativized into Igede and also adopting the open syllable structure (ending in vowels) form of the language. Furthermore, there is an addition of a prefix (i) to consonant sound /k/ to become /ik/ at the word initial of 'computer' and also /a/ vowel is added at the word final to create a more fluid, natural pronunciation in Igede. While in the words 'ogom' (in-law), akpa (box) and in some personal names such as '*Ijoma*', '*Onwu*' '*Ugwo*' and '*Agocha*' there is zero morpheme changes in both Igbo and Igede.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Igede borrows words from major languages such as English, Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo languages. English language can be said to be the greatest donor language to Igede. Some of the above words borrowed into Igede gained entry through religion, language contact (English/Igede) and technological innovation.

Trade, commerce and government are not left out as some Hausa and Igbo words entered into the Igede language as well. Through trading between native speakers of Hausa, Igbo and Igede some of the above words were used by both traders and consciously and unconsciously, such words were borrowed into Igede language.

Aside this, since the Igbo share boundary and certain cultural similarities like naming ceremonies, marriage rite, breaking of kola-nuts among others with the Igedes, it is easy for the Igedes to borrow words from them as loan words which with the passage of time became permanent loans, enriching the vocabulary of Igede.

Furthermore, borrowed words in Igede undergo certain linguistic changes in order to fit into the phonological, morphological and semantic structure of the language. The phonological modification in Igede borrowed words is reflected in vowel insertion (epenthesis),

consonant substitution, and simplification of consonant clusters; while the morphological modification of borrowed words in Igede reflects affixation patterning such as prefixation, prefixation-suffixation and zero morpheme changes. These modifications allow borrowed words to integrate seamlessly into Igede.

Borrowing enriches the Igede word stock by filling lexical gaps, especially for concepts that did not originally exist in Igede language and culture. It also expands the communicative capacity of the language, enabling the speakers to engage with new domains of knowledge and technology. Words from Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba languages shows culture integration allowing and giving Igede speakers a vast vocabulary needed to interact with diverse multi-linguistic communities.

## **Conclusion**

Borrowing is a linguistic phenomenon languages cannot do without because, it occurs naturally and other linguistic activities such as inter-marriage, travel, trade encourages and make way for it to enter the languages. Borrowing is a morphological process which should be accepted by all languages and communities because, it serves to strengthen the recipient language and its speakers, increasing the word stock of that language and also allowing for the language to grow and develop. Furthermore, phonological and morphological modifications of borrowed words were found to be part of borrowing in Igede and are essential for their integration into the Igede morphological structure.

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