

# Sociolinguistic Dynamism: The Case of Kanuri Lexical Borrowing from Hausa in Damagaram

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**How to cite this paper:** Aichatou, A. N. (2020). Sociolinguistic Dynamism: The Case of Kanuri Lexical Borrowing from Hausa in Damagaram. *Advances in Literary Study*, 8, 58-67.

<https://doi.org/10.4236/als.2020.82006>

**Received:** February 1, 2020

**Accepted:** March 29, 2020

**Published:** April 1, 2020

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## Abstract

One of the most frequently encountered products of cultural contact is the borrowing. Borrowing is seen to be a source, an important source of language enrichment as well as of language endangerment. When a given language borrows a great amount of lexical terms from another language, we assume that the two languages have the same attributes or else they have been in contact for a long time. As a result, the current study investigates the Kanuri borrowed words from Hausa. The study is limited to what lexical terms have been borrowed by the Kanuri from the Hausa, how has the borrowing come about as all languages have the means to create, enrich themselves out of their own resources. In other words, why do the Kanuri people borrow a word or words from the Hausa while they have a fully equivalent beforehand? In this research, the researcher collected the data by taking notes and later arranged as documentations for further analysis. Finally, the researcher finds that actually many consider the Kanuri borrowed terms from the Hausa as typically Kanuri and could not dissociate them with other Kanuri words. Hence, the necessity for the current study to bring out the endangerment of borrowing for the Kanuri people and point out the necessity for the language to coin new words (neologism) that could better enrich its lexicon.

## Keywords

Language Contact, Language Endangerment, Lexical Borrowing, Neologism

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## 1. Introduction

As Akindele and Adegbite (2005: p. 3) stated “one of the main preoccupation of sociolinguistics is not just about the study of the relationship between language and society but also about the relationship between languages, cultures and tradition as well as the politics of particular language community”.

In fact, contact between languages is one of the critical mass of human behaviour, which is said to be induced by a number of factors. According to Bello (2015: p. 35), the chief among these factors included close proximity between speech communities, migration of people from one place to another, trade relationship between people living in borderline areas, intermarriage and subjugation through wars. Abdulrahman and Shehu (2014: p. 95) asserts that many changes usually occur because of contact relationship between languages. When languages come into contact over a period of time, through the social interaction of the speakers of the languages, the outcome is the diffusion of cultural items across linguistic boundaries.

The studies of all the borrowings in major languages that have occurred are too extensive to cover, due to page limits in the current study; but what is worth mentioning is that the Kanuri and Hausa languages are no exception to the rules. In other words, within the larger scope of languages contact, we will analyze, in this paper, the phenomenon of lexical borrowing that occurs from Hausa to Kanuri and its consequences (positive or negative). Process of importing linguistic items from one linguistic system into another one, a process that occurs at any time two cultures are in contact over a period of time (Hoffa, 2002).

Trauth & Kazzazi (1996: p. 55) defines “linguistic borrowing” as “the adoption of a linguistic expression from one language into another”. For Haugen (1969: p. 363), borrowing is “the attempt by a speaker to reproduce in one language patterns which he has learned in another”. Akindele and Adegbite (2005: p. 43) refer to borrowing as the occasional use of items from one language in the utterance of another language whereas Suzanne referred to borrowing as simply words adopted by speakers of one language from a different language. For Uriel Weinreich (1953), the most frequently encountered product of cultural contact is the set of loanwords that follow from in cultural communication.

What is more, there are also scholars who have categorized borrowing: Prasasty (2002: p. 16), for instance, classified borrowing into three main parts; they are loans, pronunciation borrowing, and as well as grammatical borrowing. Ashafa, S. A., Bello, S. U. (2014) pointed out three important social variables, which can affect the kind and extent of borrowing, such as the relative prestige of the language or language that comes into contact. Secondly, the relative numbers of speakers of the two languages and lastly, whether or not the language lent by other speakers carry its fixed habit from their own old language into the new one. As for Molina and Albir (2002: p. 520), borrowing is divided into two kinds: pure borrowing and naturalized borrowing. Our focus in this research is related to pure borrowing. We talk of pure lexical borrowing when a word or expression is transferred, without any change, from a source language (Hausa in this case) to a target language (Kanuri in this case). Thus, the case in point is the spread of several words from Hausa vernacular in Damagaram that have penetrated the lexicon of the Kanuri; This is, because, Hausa and Kanuri share the same environment for long, that borrowing is not just a feature of bilingualism and multilingualism but also a feature of monolingualism.

What is good to raise at this level of analysis is that lexical borrowing has been an interest to various fields of linguistics for some time (Whitney, 1875; De Saussure, 1915; Pedersen, 1931). However, explaining why languages change is generally difficult, and as well as explaining why languages borrow words is no exception especially when the language already owns words to denote things. Also, the influence of one language on another may occur in all areas of grammar, including the lexicon, morphology, phonology, syntax and semantics.

The paper's primary concern is about the concept of borrowing and it, as well, discusses some important aspects that led to such borrowing and even the consequences if any. In fact, some deleterious set back include language interference problem arising from interlanguage or inter-lingual phenomenon, issues of linguistic suicide/murder, language and cultural endangerment and of course language extinction (Ashafa & Bello, 2014). About tens of hundreds of the Kanuri borrowing terms from Hausa are, up to date, considered as typically kanuri and that could not be dissociated with other Kanuri words while existing kanuri words are getting out of use. The rhetorical question, which we are tempted to ask here, is whether Kanuri people are facing linguistic suicide and or cultural endangerment.

## **2. Language Contact and the Interdependency of Language**

Ashafa & Bello (2014: p. 98) view that "Language contact is the necessity of intercourse which brings the speakers of one language into direct or indirect contact with those of neighboring or culturally dominant languages... Whatever the degree or nature of contact between neighboring people, it is generally sufficient to lead to some kind of linguistic interference."

The simplest kind of influence that one language may exert on another is the borrowing of words whereas the most widespread linguistic evidence of language contact according to Ashafa, S. A. & Bello, S. U. (2014) is the presence of words borrowed from one language to another and which have become part of the language. Since contact is the basis for borrowing linguistic items from one language to another, it is pertinent to examine the historical contact between Hausa and Kanuri, which might have, exist because of religion, politics and mostly trade contact influences. What follows is an overview of the contact between the Hausa and the Kanuri

## **3. An Overview of the Contact between the Kanuri and the Hausa in Damagaram**

The Hausa people are longtime neighbours of the Kanuri people. The relationship of Hausa and the Kanuri people still stands in Africa as one of the best among ancient African Kingdoms. These two groups of people respect each other and they always support each other at the time of needs and distress. The two have a very strong historical trading relationship.

The kanuri kingdom with its remnant cities, provinces and states like Borno

and Yobe states in Nigeria, Damagaram (Zinder) in Niger (...) were said to have originated from the East. The Kanuris mainly live in North-Eastern Nigeria, Western Niger, South Eastern Chad and Northern Cameroon Republics (...) [Abubakar \(n.d: p. 1\)](#). The expansions of the Kanuri Empire (in present Chad) led to a continuous migration to the west of Lake Chad into present Nigeria and bordering Niger ([Cyffer, n.d: p. 33](#)). By then, Kanuri played the dominant role and acted as a language of wider communication.

On the other hand, Hausa, “by far the largest of the 130 or more languages which constitute the Chadic family, covers most of the northern and western extent of the family across northern Nigeria, and into southern Niger ([Hour & Rossi, 2010](#)). During the past decades, we observed the decrease of Kanuri and the increase of Hausa. So Kanuri gradually lost its function as a language of wider communication while Hausa, through intensive contact phenomena become more prominent, grew rapidly, took over its role and became the language of wider communication ([Phillips, 2004: p.51; Cyffer, n.d: pp. 33-37](#)).

As for the interface between the two communities or even better between the two languages, the relationship does not only attract each other’s culture and religion, but most greatly their languages; that is as far as the Kanuri and Hausa languages are concerned, it is good to recall that in Damagaram, not only the Kanuri and the Hausa live within the same environment; but also and mainly that some of those who are considered Hausa, in Damagaram, are, in fact, Kanuri who lost the use of their Kanuri language either because of intercultural marriage between the Kanuri and the Hausa or simply because Hausa language has later become dominant in the area.

In fact, Hausa is not only a “market” language but also and mainly that the advent of radio and television and as well as the production of films in Hausa have favored to enlarge the linguistic and communicative scope of Hausa. As a result of everyday contact between them, many lexical items are found in each of the languages. Thanks to the social interactions, the Kanuri or the speakers of Kanuri, particularly employ various terms, which are originally Hausa, in their daily communications.

This is because, as said earlier, not only it is true that many factors influence the amount and rate of borrowing, but it is also true that when a given language borrows lexical terms from another language, we assume that the two languages have the same attributes or else they have been in contact for a relatively long period. Rightly, Hudson supports that the most widespread linguistic evidence of language contact is the presence of words borrowed from one language to another and which became part of the language. As a result, the current study, in the next section, investigates the Kanuri borrowed words from Hausa that have penetrated Kanuri language. Yet, because of everyday contact between them, many lexical items are found in each of the two languages.

The focus of the paper is, as said earlier, to raise and discuss a specific number of borrowing lexical items from Hausa that occur in the daily communication of

the Kanuri and will focus on the effect/consequences either positive or negative.

#### 4. Concept of Lexical Borrowing

There is no doubt the most conspicuous type of language change is the appearance of new words in an existing language. At present, there are about 6000 different languages spoken in our planet and every one of these languages has a vocabulary containing thousands of words. Moreover, speakers of every one of these languages are in contact with neighbors who speak different language (Ashafa & Bello, 2014). Consequently, Hoffa (2002: p. 53) states that: “one of the most easily observable results of intercultural contact and communication is the set of loanwords that is important into the vocabulary of each language involved”.

Borrowing is a way, one of the most frequent of enriching a language and speakers of all languages do it following the advent of new materials and or concepts. As Haspelmat (2009: p. 36) asserted: “loanword or lexical borrowing is a word at some point in the history of a language entered its lexicon as a result of borrowing or transfer, or copying”. This is the case of Hausa and Kanuri that have long been borrowers of each other’s words. Below are some examples of words of Hausa borrowed from Kanuri and vice versa (Table 1). Though our focus is Kanuri borrowed terms from Hausa, it is good to point out that the borrowing process is done through a certain reciprocity.

In his *Hausa reference grammar*, Newman (2000: p. 315) makes an interesting statement as follows: “The number of words borrowed from Kanuri is undoubtedly underestimated because many words of Arabic origin that are included in lists of Arabia loanwords in fact came into Hausa via Kanuri” (Table 2).

What is more, due to sociolinguistic dynamism, both Hausa and Kanuri are known to borrow either from Arabic or English languages (Table 3).

**Table 1.** Examples of Hausa words borrowed from Kanuri.

	HAUSA	KANURI	MEANING
1	Ingo	Ngo	Take
2	Kuttu	Kuttu	Bad news
3	Lale	Lale	Exclamation
4	Kasari	Kasar	Curtain
5	Soro	Soro	Room
6	Cunko	Cungo	Tree
7	Barema	Barema	Farmer
8	Kalu	Kalu	Sauce
9	Kindirmu	Kindirmu	Yagourt
10	Manda	Manda	Salt

**Table 2.** Examples of words borrowed by Kanuri but yet, some of Arab origin.

	<b>KANURI</b>	<b>HAUSA</b>	<b>MEANING</b>
1	Dabba	Dabba	Animal (generic term)
2	Dambe	Dambe	Kick
3	Dala	Dala	Money
4	Gashi	Gashi	Hair
5	Kutuho	Kutuho	Boxing
6	Nama	Nama	Meat
7	Rigargashi	Rigargashi	Head cover

**Table 3.** Both Hausa and Kanuri often borrow words from Arab or English.

	<b>KANURI</b>	<b>HAUSA</b>	<b>ARABIC</b>	<b>ENGLISH</b>
1	Lebura	Lebura		Labour
2	Alalam	Alkalami	Alkalam	
3	Kwap	Kwap		Cup
4	Salla	Sallah	Sallat	
5	Salula	Salula		Cellular
6	Duniya	Duniya	Dunya	
7	Kwana	Kwana		Corner/container
8	Bayani	Bayani	Bayyan	
9	Fitna	Fitina	Fitna	
10	Maskin	Miskin	Miskin	
11	Mota	Mota		Vehicle

Sometimes, words are not borrowed but translated; for instance: the word Kanuri Kanji Alaye is translated in HAUSA, bawan Allah; the Hausa also makes use of calque to get Kanji Alabe. The English word “computer” is translated in Hausa “na’ura mai kwakwalwa”, camera by na’urar dauka foto; calculator as raskwana. Some other time loanwords are assimilated; for instance, Kanuri and Hausa borrowed words like bread, brake, blue, driver, fridge etc, from English language and they finally adapt to their respective native sound patterns. Then, bread is pronounced “burodi”, brake as “birki”, blue as “bulu”, driver as “direba” and fridge as “firji” etc.

Borrowing can occur in the form of linguistic interference whereas at the lexical level as stated by (Ashafa & Bello, 2014), people borrow words from a given language and transform them to sound more natural in their language. At the phonological level, where organic sounds like ba da gy ky ky kwa tsa, za, etc are concerned, no matter how fluent a Kanuri speaker may be in Hausa language, they usually experience difficulty if not fail to pronounce words containing the abovementioned letters. Instead, they alternate them to the closest available sound in their native language (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Examples of such related difficulties in pronunciation.

	HAUSA	KANURI	MENMING
1	Barawo	Barawo	Thief
2	Daci	Daci	Bitter
3	Zana	Jana	Fence
4	Zara	Djara	Proper noun
5	Matsala	Masala	Difficulty
6	Tsatsa	Sasa	Rustiness
7	Kaka	Kaka	How is it?

## 5. Borrowing as a Break to the Kanuri Language

Haspelmath (2009) raises an interesting question such that why a borrowing had to take place at all? This is because all languages have the means to create novel expressions out of their own resources. Instead of borrowing a word, they could simply make up a new word. And of course there are many other cases where it is not all clear why a language borrowed a word from another language, because a fully equivalent word existed before hand. Thus, Hausa has no need to borrow avion, bateau, train, disque from French as Hausa has jirgin bisa, jirgin ruwa and jirgin kasa and faifai or, laptop, camara, calculator from English as it has n'aura mai kwakwalwa, naura mai daukar hoto, raskwana respectively it creates up from its own resources.

Moreover, “speakers of a particular language may (...) borrow terms from another language in order to fill in gaps The paradox in this context is that Kanuri already owns words to express things. Why does Kanuri borrow the following words when equivalent words existed before hand as follows (Table 5)?

So why does the Kanuri borrow to the extent to endanger or suicide itself? It is true that as long as a language co-exist or co-relate with each other, borrowing between them cannot be “ruled out”; that “...When there is cultural borrowing there is always the likelihood that the associated words may be borrowed too” (Ashafa & Bello, 2014: p. 99). But, why do Kanuri people borrowed from Hausa while Kanuri already has the full equivalent words in its language?

Is it by the time it (The Kanuri language) gradually lost its function as a language of wider communication or during the 20th Century the dominance of the Hausa language grew rapidly because of intensive Islamization and Christianization as well as “western” education and mass media as Hoffa (2002) pointed that “usually intimate borrowing involves a dominant or upper and a lower language and the borrowing is primarily from the upper to the lower”, or, still because of this other viewpoints that contact with a prestige language, whether there are numbers of speakers in contact or not, often results in borrowing by the educated classes, which in turn may or may not diffuse the loanwords through the general vocabulary. We note with an unknown author that the term borrowing refers to a completed language change, a diachronic process that once started as

**Table 5.** Words borrowed by Kanuri from Hausa yet, equivalent words exist before hand.

	KANURI		HAUSA	MEANING
	Borrowing	Existing		
1	Godedu	<b>Wusha</b>	Godiya	<b>Thanking</b>
2	Wahala	<b>Jumbaro</b>	Wahala	<b>Fatigue</b>
3	Bincike	<b>Kushene</b>	Bincike	<b>Research</b>
4	Zahi	<b>Muktu</b>	Zahi	<b>Heat</b>
5	Wondo	<b>Yange</b>	Wondo	<b>Trousers</b>
6	Yardadu	<b>Karate</b>	Yarda	<b>Acceptance</b>
7	Mutunci	<b>Noum kom</b>	Mutumci	<b>Integrity</b>
8	Turane	<b>Joune</b>	Tura	<b>Push forward</b>
9	Gashi	<b>Kunduri</b>	Gashi	<b>Hair</b>
10	gashinbaki	<b>Cikunduri</b>	Gashinbaki	<b>Mustache</b>
11	Dubara	<b>Nunga</b>	Dubara	<b>Strategy</b>
12	Nasartu	<b>Jabtukena</b>	Nasara	<b>Chance/victory</b>
13	walakanci	<b>Njokuno</b>	Walakanci	<b>Humiliation</b>
14	Kasko	<b>Ngaya</b>	Kasko	<b>Pot</b>
15	bakinciki	<b>Karu culum</b>	Bakin ciki	<b>Wickedness</b>
16	Kalaci	<b>Masana</b>	Kalaci	<b>Food</b>
17	Likitari	<b>Lotordi</b>	Likita	<b>Health center</b>
18	Dambe	<b>Ngeluwu</b>	Dambe	<b>Kick (using hand)</b>
19	ganingna	<b>Asugna</b>	Ganewa	<b>Understanding</b>
20	Zato	<b>Gene</b>	Zato	<b>suspicion</b>

an individual innovation but has been propagated throughout the speech community.

Kanuri has been reported to have acted as a link to carry Arabic loans to other languages in the contact zone, including Hausa, that it has had an impact on many Chadic languages. Hausa as stated by [Greenberg \(1960\)](#) borrowed kanuri vocabulary in earlier times. As for [Newman \(2000\)](#), the situation has been reversed and Hausa makes inroads into traditional Kanuri-speaking areas. Then the living together, creates a flexibility in borrowing from one another, a flexibility that has enriched the vocabulary over the century. However, is it easier to borrow or to create new words (Neologism)?

## 6. Borrowing versus Neologism

In order to answer to the actual need of communication, the language must be worked out and be better equipped. The world evolves, develops itself; languages change and develop. The question is to encourage the enrichment of language. That is why languages borrow to each other. That borrowing is a source of en-



riching the language. But, this does not mean that there are no negative consequences as pointed out by the case of the Kanuri language; that a language that borrows too much risks endangerment or suicide even though, sometimes, it is easier to borrow than to create. But we are of the same opinion with [Haspelmath \(2009: p. 35\)](#) who states that “(...) all languages have the means to create novel expressions out of their own resources, instead of borrowing a word, they could simply make up a new word,”

As no language has been rich enough to dispense itself from creating new words or expressions to meet its lexical need, neologism, cutting across every aspect of human life has become an important tool for language expansion through several processes of word formation. Nonetheless, as well as borrowing, “neologism can be an obstacle to communication, but is, to a great extent a vector of development. It helps a language to have the necessary and adequate words and expressions to convey the desired concepts and contexts and to keep pace with the advancement of technology” ([Nana, 1996: p. 20](#)). Neologism is, as well, useful in the adaptation of the society to the needs of efficient communication.

We have so far talked about borrowing as a source of enriching a language even if, with regards to the case of Kanuri, it endangers the language by impoverishing it of its own words while enriching it with words of another language in this case Hausa language. Else, “whatever the aftermath effect of borrowing, languages borrow (...) because of the need to make communication between the native speakers of these languages mutually intelligible” ([Ashafa & Bello, 2014: p. 105](#)). We are of the opinion that a language should innovate, create to become richer and give itself the means to move with the World. No language is rich enough to dispense itself from neologism. Hence, whatever the motive that is at the origin of the creation of a word or of a concept, neologism, without saying, is a source of enrichment of the language. It shows its value in the adaptation of the society to the needs of efficiency in communication, that Kanuri must make a shift to the latter.

## **7. Conclusion**

All in all, borrowing is an important source of language change and loans from other languages are important sources of new words. But, the outcome of the research is that borrowing constitutes a great endangerment to a given language as the vocabulary of the target language will stagnate or else will be full of borrowed words. For any language, in general, and Kanuri language, in particular, to survive, to meet its lexical need and become a great vector of development in the socio economic and political arena, it has to create, recreate itself, that is to have the necessary and adequate words and expressions to convey the desired concepts and contexts and to keep pace with the advancement of technology. Since then, neologism has become an important tool for language expansion even though; sometimes it is easier to borrow than to create new words.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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