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Some Lexico-Semantic Processes in Naija

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Abstract

This paper undertakes a lexico-semantic analysis of lexical inventory in Naija . Some of the lexico-semantic processes analyzed in it, with the aid of copious examples, include; polysemy calquing, syntactic paraphrase/circumlocution, compounding and reduplication. It observes that these processes are influenced mainly by substrate languages. The essay also discusses how these processes influence words borrowed from substrate languages.

1. Introduction

The elaboration and creolization of Naija has resulted in an increase in the language's vocabulary inventory to meet the communicative needs of its speakers. The increase in vocabulary inventory evolves from introduction of new lexemes and from the lexico-semantic processes in the language. This paper discusses some of the lexico-semantic processes found in the lexical inventory of Naija. The processes include: polysemy or multifunctionality, calquing, syntactic paraphrase/circumlocution, compounding and reduplication. The paper notes that linguists have always observed that a substantial number of Naija's vocabulary is from its lexifier language-English. However, the substratum languages also contribute to the vocabulary inventory of the language since most of the lexico-semantic processes in Naija are derived from substrate languages¹. It discusses the effect of substratum influence on some of the lexico-semantic processes highlighted above. On the issue of substrate influence on Naija vocabulary inventory, Mafeni (1971:106) observes that:

...although English has supplied the vast majority of the items that make up the Nigerian pidgin lexicon, the various substrates also supply vocabulary items (however few) as well as the more important processes by which the English loan-words are made to acquire new or additional meanings.

The data for this paper is collected from the Warri/Sapele variety of standard Naija². Since this variety is already creolising, the paper also discusses how it increases its vocabulary inventory to meet new domains of use.

¹ Substrate influence on lexico-semantic processes is still common in pidgins and creoles that have close contact with their substrate languages. So, this feature is common in West African Pidgins. (see Bickerton, 1975, and Holm, 1988).

² The two standard varieties of the mesolectal sociolect evolved from its elaborate use as a lingua franca and its creolization. They are found in the Niger Delta region. They are the Warri/Sapele or Western variety and the Port-Harcourt or Eastern variety. (see Faraclas, 1996 Mowarin, 2004, and Elugbe and Omamor, 1991) for further insight into the distinctive features of the two standard varieties.

2. Lexical Semantics

Lexicology is an indispensable part of the field of semantics. Lexical semantics deals with the study of lexis; it focuses on denotation, lexical relations, derivational relations and lexical universals. It is observed in lexical semantics that the denotation of a word is not studied in isolation. Saeed (2007:53) reinforces this fact when says that: "...the meaning of a word is defined in part by its relation with other words in the language".

An acceptable definition of the word has always remained elusive among lexicologists. What is being used is an operative definition which states that a word can always be assigned to a part of speech. Saeed's (2007:51) definition of the word has a morphological connotation when he asserts thus:

A word, then, is a free form which does not consist entirely of (two or more) lesser free forms, in brief, a word is a minimum free form since only free forms can be isolated in actual speech, the word or the minimum free form plays a very important part in our attitude towards language. For the purpose of ordinary life, the word is the smallest unit of speech.

Although it is possible to dichotomize between lexemes and syntactic constituents, like phrases and clauses in English, such clear cut dichotomy is quite tenuous in Naija³. So lexemes that are borrowed from English to Naija undergo certain modifications in the letter due to substratum influence. Due to this fact, Naija has lexical items and *syntactic words* as will be observed in this paper.

3. Multifunctionality/Polysemy

In this paper, multifunctionality and polysemy will be regarded as two concepts that share many features in common; however, there is a slight difference between them in the context of this essay. The fact cannot be gainsaid that the lexical inventory of Naija is fewer than that of English. We believe that one of the ways Naija has been able to compensate for the few lexical items it borrowed from English to meet its communicative need is to borrow a lexical item and collapse all other lexical items in English that are related to the one borrowed by Naija. Below are some examples of this lexico-semantic process.

1.	English loanword	Naija	English translation
	for (prep.)	fɔ (prep.)	for, in, beside; inside, on
	fowl (n.)	fao (n.)	chicken, cock, hen, chick
	one (num., art.)	wɔn (det.)	a(n), one (num.), a certain
	plenty (quant.)	plɛnti (quant.)	a lot of, much, several, plenty of

In the examples above, the five prepositions in English are collapsed into the single Naija preposition (fɔ). The phonetic shape of this Naija preposition shows that it is obviously loaned from English. So, Naija (fɔ) plays multiple functions any time it is used in a clause. Pragmatic context is used by the Naija speaker to identify the specific function of Naija (fɔ) whenever it is used in an English clause. In distinguishing between *cock*, *hen* and *chick*, the Naija speaker resorts to either circumlocution or calquing. This lexico-semantic process will be discussed in the latter part of this paper.

Naija lexicon makes extensive use of polysemy; it has a close affinity with homonymy. Lexicographers believe that homonymy and polysemy are identical in certain respect because they deal with “...multiple senses of the same phonological word” (Saeed 2007:64). However, there is a distinction between them. While homonymous senses have separate entries in a dictionary, polysemous senses have a single entry.

Naija derives numerous polysemous senses from single lexemes in English. This is one of the lexico-semantic processes that the language subjects lexemes borrowed from English into. Below are some examples

2. **chọp** – (to feed). One assumes that its etymology is from the English word chop which means *to cut meat in little bits*.

a. (N) food

Di chọp dọn dọn?
the food be.PAST cook
Is the food cooked?

b. (V) to eat

A de chọp.
I PROG eat
I am eating

c. (Adj) enjoyment.

Wi de chóp laif.
We PROG enjoy life
We are merrying / there is merriment here.

3. **kọt** (cut).

a. (V) to severe an item

A dọn kọt di mit.
I PERF cut DEF meat
I have cut the meat.

b. (N) a bribe

I laik kọt wẹl wẹl.
He/she likes bribe alot

c. (N) a share of profit or loss

Giv mi mai kọt.
Give me my share of the profit

4. **họt** – (hot)

a. (Adj) hot

Di wọta dọn họt.
The water is now hot.

b. (Adj) tough/difficult

i. **Di kuẹschọn họt.**
The question is difficult

ii. **Dat man họt.**
That man is tough.

c. (Adj) desperate

Yu tu họt.
You are too desperate

5. **Rọsh** (rush)

a. (V) walk briskly:

A de rọsh go wọk.
I PROG rush to work
I am walking briskly to work.

b. (V) pressurize:

Yu dé rọsh mi.
you PROG rush me
You are pressurizing me

c. (V) move sth./sb. quickly:

Mek wi rọsh di gel go ọspitol.
We should hurriedly take the girl to the hospital

d. (V) have quick sexual intercourse also known as “quickie”:

A rọsh dat gel yestade .
I had a “quickie”(quick sexual intercourse) with the girl yesterday.

6. **jọj** (judge)

- a. (N) a legal practitioner who decides a case

Dat man na jọj.
That man is a judge

- b. (V) to gossip:

Una de jọj o.
You people are engaged in gossip

- c. (N) a gossip:

My broda na jọj.
My brother is a gossip

- d. (N) an unsolicited arbitrator:

Hu mek yu jọj?
Who made you an unsolicited arbitrator?

7. **raid** (ride)

- a. (N) car:

Mai papa gẹt raid.
My father has a car

- b. (V) to drive:

A de raid my papa raid/moto.
I am driving my father's car

- c. (V) be disrespectful:

Mek yu no raid mi o.
Don't be disrespectful to me.

Extended use of meaning through polysemy in Naija is not limited to lexical items borrowed from the lexifier language. Words from substratum languages also play polysemous sense. An example is the Yoruba word:

8. **dágbó**

- a. (N) a dupe:

Dat man na dágbó.
That man is a dupe.

- b. (Adj) fake:

**Di wotch wey dem tek gold mek
wé a bai na dagbó.**

The golden wristwatch that I bought is fake.

- c. (V) to dupe someone:

Di bank maneja dagbo mi.

The bank manager duped me

There are also instances of derivational morphological processes on some words derived from substratum languages. Based on this, **dagborist** (N), (a person who engages in the act of duping) is derived from **dagbo** (V), and **wayorist** (N), “a person who routinely cheats others” is derived from **wayo** (N), “the act of duping someone”.

4. Compounds

A compound is a word which is derived from the concatenation of two or more words. Semantically, there is a close relationship between the individual words that make up the compound and the derived compound word. Three types of compound identified in the literature are endocentric, exocentric and co-ordinate ones³. Our study will focus mainly on endocentric compounds Fabb (2001:68-69) defines an endocentric compound thus:

Compounds which have a head are called endocentric compounds. A head of a compound has similar characteristics to the head of a phrase: it represents the core meaning of the constituent and it is of the same word class.

Endocentric compounds are always right hand headed; the relationship between the root on the left and right hand is that of a modifier-modifiee. Compounds are also formed in Naija from some of the polysemous lexemes described above. In deriving the compound, there is the modifier and the modifiee relationship between the lexeme on the left hand side and the one on the right hand side. Most compounds in Naija are right hand headed. Three or more compounds can be derived from a word through this recursive process as shown in the examples below:

With **eria** (N), “area, territory” acting as the first root which functions as modifier, other free forms follow it to derive the following compounds.

- | | | | |
|-----|---------------------|------------|---|
| 9a. | eria boi (N) | (area boy) | a boy residing in a community |
| b. | eria boi (N) | (area boy) | a group of notorious boys residing in a neighbourhood who engage in drug addiction, stealing and extortion; |

³ For a detailed analysis of the intertwined nature of words, phrases and clauses in pidgins and creoles in relation to lexical semantics, (see Holm 1988, and Muhlauster 1986).

- c. **eria bàbà** (N) (area barber) an itinerant barber who plies his trade shuttling from one home to another;
 - d. **eria skata** (N) (area scatter) a young man who rapes girls in a community.
- The following compounds are derived from **bad** (Adj), “bad, unsatisfactory, wrong”.

- 10a. **bad hẹd** (N) (bad head) unlucky person
- b. **bad dud** (N) (bad dude) notorious person
- c. **bad makẹt** (N) (bad market) a failed enterprise
- d. **bad neim** (N) (bad name) a person who has a negative image
- e. **bad wẹda** (N) (bad weather) a time of financial difficulty
- f. **bad wẹda** (N) (bad weather) a disastrous period
- g. **bad bẹlẹ** (N) (bad belly) envious

From **chọp** (V), “eat”, the following compounds are derived:

- 11a. **chọp bẹlẹful** (V) eat to satisfaction
- b. **chọp laif** (Adj) to make merriment
- c. **chọp winch** (N) a crazy and irrational person
- d. **chọp mọni** (N) pocket money

The following compounds are derived from **kọt** (cut):

- 12a. **kọt ai** (V) (cut eye) give eye signal
- b. **kọt hat** (V) (cut heart) to surprise
- c. **kọt nit** (Adj) (cut neat) a very expensive item
- d. **kọt tel** (V) (cut tail) to initiate

From the polysemous word **dai** (die), the following compounds are derived:

- 13a. **dai put** (V) (die put) hold tenaciously to something;
- b. **dai wake** (V) (die wake) recover from a desperate financial situation.

It is possible to describe some of the compounds above as idiomatic expressions since the meaning of the compound word in each is distinct from that of the pair of lexemes that are concatenated to form it.

5. Calquing

A third lexico-semantic process in Naija is a specific type of compound known as calquing. Mafeni (1971:102) defines this lexico-semantic process as:

[...] a kind of compounding [...] utilizing English loan words in combination according to the pattern of compounds to be found in Nigerian languages. Strọng-hẹd (stubborn) opun-ay (boldness, wisdom) are a few examples which spring readily mind.

So, the combination of the two or more English loan words are made to have the structure of substrate languages. Some newly calqued words now commonly used in Naija utterances include:

- 14a. **shuk maut put** (V) (shook mouth put), “interfere”.

Urhobo, a South Western Edoid language spoken as a lingua franca in the Warri/Sapele speech community has a translation equivalent of the above phrase. So it can be described as a case of calquing as shown below.

Wó dúgh ùnú Vwì yó tá mè.
 you NEG shook mouth in matter me
Do not interfere into my matter.

14b. **shuk leg autsaid** (shook leg outside), “to engage in an adulterous relationship by a married woman”.

It is also a calquing of the Urhobo language. In Nigeria it has the features of an idiomatic expression.

Áyé ná dú vwó wo vwé yó tá fé
 Married woman that has shook leg outside
That married woman is engaged in adulterous relationship

Although the transliterations are taken from Urhobo, we believe that this feature permeates all Kwa languages which constitute the substrates of Naija.

14c.	lọng rop	(long rope)	a period of grace
d.	bọtòm bọks	(bottom box)	a person’s best clothes
e.	bọn autsaid	(born outside)	a bastard
f.	bẹnd nẹk	(bend neck)	to pretend to be shy
g.	big man	(big man)	a wealthy man
h.	drọ yash	(withdraw buttocks)	to withdraw
i.	lẹn wọk	(learn work)	an apprentice
j.	kọmọt maind	(remove mind)	to forget about an issue
k.	gẹt hẹd	(get head)	to be reasonable
l.	sọfa hẹd	(suffer head)	an unlucky person
m.	dẹd bọdi	(dead body)	a corpse

6. Syntactic Paraphrase

A syntactic paraphrase is either a phrase or a clause structure functioning as a single lexeme in terms of denotation. Such paraphrases have close affinity with circumlocution because a Naija speaker who seeks recourse to a paraphrase is trying to describe a concept that can be described with a single lexeme in English. Below are a few examples.

15a.	chọp klin maut	(eat clean mouth)	a deceptive/hypocritical woman
b.	chọp dọg lẹg	(eat a dog’s leg)	a restless person
c.	du am strọng tin	(do him/her harm)	injure
d.	a nor wiẹ pant	(I’m not wearing pant)	surprised, incredible
e.	du smẹ smẹ	(behave sluggishly)	sluggish
f.	a nẹva dai	(I am not dead)	listen to my argument
g.	du bẹta	(do better)	act appropriately
h.	rein dọn fọl	(rain has fallen)	salary has been paid

- | | | | |
|----|------------------------|---------------------|---|
| i. | pe wit tit | (pay with teeth) | too expensive |
| j. | sidon luk | (sit down and look) | watch/study a situation |
| k. | yu fol mai hand | (you fall my hand) | you disappointed me, I'm disappointed in you. |

7. Reduplication

Reduplication is another lexico-semantic process that substrate languages subject words borrowed from the lexifier language into Naija. It shows that Naija lexicon is not static but dynamic in nature; this dynamism is triggered mostly by substratum influence. Holm (1988:88) defines reduplication as:

"[...] mechanism for forming new words. It involves the repetition of a word (or part of a word) resulting in a distinct lexical item slightly different in meaning."

In agglutinating and inflectional languages, the constituent of the lexical item reduplicated can be a bound morpheme which functions as a prefix, infix and suffix. This phenomenon is absent in Naija, which is very poor in morphology, and kwa languages which are mainly isolating/analytical in terms of morphological cross linguistic typology⁴. A whole word can also be the material for reduplication. The latter is prevalent in Naija. Fabb (2001:60) calls this reduplication of whole words *Repetition compounds* and he defines this type of reduplication thus:

Whole word reduplication is sometimes described as a compounding process because each part of the resulting words corresponds to an independently attested word.

The main function of reduplication in Naija is that it functions as an intensifier. Below are a few examples.

- | | | | |
|------|--------------------------|-----------------|--|
| 16a. | hori hori (ADV) | (hurry hurry) | hurriedly, fastly |
| b. | kona kona (Adj) | (corner corner) | windy |
| c. | kona kona (N) | (corner corner) | very secretive love officer |
| d. | gbuma gbuma (Adj) | (fat fat) | a very fat person/a very majestic walk |
| e. | meki meki (Adj) | (make make) | counterfeit |
| f. | koti koti (N) | (cut cut) | made of bite and pieces |
| g. | toku toku (N) | (talk talk) | lengthy/windy speech |
| h. | toku toku (Adj) | (talk talk) | a loquacious person |
| i. | poko poko (Adj) | (succulent) | succulent |
| j. | kule kule (ADV) | (cool cool) | quietly |
| k. | dro dro (adj) | (draw draw) | tendon of meat |
| l. | yagha yagha (adj) | disorderly | disorderly |

⁴ In terms of morphological typology, the four morphological systems recognized in the literature are *isolating*, *agglutinating*, *inflectional* and *polysynthetic*. For a detailed study of these morphological variations see "Morphological Typology" (37-39) in Spencer, A. (1991). *Morphological Theory*. Oxford Blackwell Educational Books.

8. Sources of new lexical items into Naija due to elaboration and creolization

As a language, Naija is a living organism, it changes over time. Naija's change in recent years is towards vibrancy due to the increase in its number of speakers, elaboration in its domain of use and the creolization of the language in some parts of the Niger Delta Region. Socio-linguistic forces have imbued Naija with wider functional domain and it has shifted the language from a low status to a high prestige one.

Naija is now called upon to encode concepts that hitherto have not been in the language. Due to this fact, lexical items are borrowed mainly from English and from substrate languages; new coinages are also been introduced into the language. Words like *browse*, *computer*, *globalization*, *change*, *militants*, *bunkering*, *meltdown* and *inflation* that did not undergo any change through lexico-semantic processes are now in Naija lexical inventory.

Practical examples of the influx of English lexical items into Naija lexicon are found in the jokes of the stand up comedians in *Night of a thousand laughs* (vols. 1-17). Most of the English words are however, cases of code mixing and code switching. *I go dye* is a comedian who traces his root to Warri and the extracts below are taken from his performances

I go dye (vol.1)

- 17a **If yu bit ajebōta children their cry dé dey very saikidelik.**
 If you beat children from wealthy homes, they weep psychedelically.
- b. **A provok giv mai papa.**
 I was angry with my father

When a member of the audience accused *I go dye* that he now bleaches his skin in (vol. 17), he responds thus

- c. **Yọ papa de blish.**
 Your father bleaches

Do you know what they call the power of money? (code switching)

- If to se mai bodi no stobon, a fọ dọn tọn oyibo.**
If I didn't have thick skin, I would have turned into a white man.

So, *provok*, *saikidelik* and *stobon* can be regarded as lexical items in Naija lexicon due to elaboration in its usage. They can however, be regarded as the outcome of code-switching.

The two Kwa languages that have contributed to the lexical inventory of Naija are Yoruba and Urhobo. Some lexical items recently introduced into Naija include:

18.	Word	Source	English Gloss
a.	ákperẹ	Yoruba	incompetent goalkeeper
b.	lẹkpà	Yoruba	slim/skinny lady
c.	orọbọ	Yoruba	very plumb lady
d.	ábákà	Urhobo	butterfly/ skinny girl
e.	òwhawha	Urhobo	harmattan/cold
f.	òzugbó	Urhobo	Fool
g.	ìbuluku	Urhobo	overflowing dress
h.	àkperiọ	Urhobo	pleasurable social activity

Some new coinages have also been introduced into Naija by its speakers. Some of them include:

- | | | | |
|------|----------------|---------------------|--|
| 19a. | akpu bẹlẹ | (Akpu tommy) | a man with big tummy |
| b. | atashment | (attachment) | (i) extra passenger
(ii) lover of a married man |
| c. | awe match | (away match) | adulterous sexual affair outside a matrimonial home. |
| d. | shabe/tiẹ rọba | (shabe/tear rubber) | brand new (car). |

9. Conclusion

There is no gainsaying the fact that the lexicon of the standard variety of Naija can never be as broad as that of its lexifier language. However, the recent change of the status of the language from a low prestige one, the elaboration in its domain of use, and its creolization have made the need for an increase in its lexical inventory imperative in order to meet the speakers' communicative needs. The paper has shown that direct transfer of lexical items will continue unabated. More importantly, Naija will continue to subject some of the lexemes borrowed from the lexifier language to the lexico-semantic processes highlighted in this paper. This invaluable contribution from substrate languages has made the lexical inventory of Naija as a contact language unique. It is hoped that this study will stimulate further interest in the morphology, lexis and semantics of this fast growing indi-exogenous and ethically neutral lingua franca in Nigeria called Naija.

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