



GLOBAL JOURNAL OF HUMAN-SOCIAL SCIENCE: A
ARTS & HUMANITIES - PSYCHOLOGY
Volume 24 Issue 2 Version 1.0 Year 2024
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal
Publisher: Global Journals
Online ISSN: 2249-460X & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

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GJHSS-A Classification: FOR Code: 200405



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Phonological Changes in the Appropriation of English Names by Masa People

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Abstract- This paper concerns itself with the appropriation of English proper names by the Masa people from and around Yagoua, a town situated in the Far North Region of Cameroon. Contact between members of this community and native English speakers has left an impact on the names of the Masa people. Many English names appropriated by the Masa people display native phonological preferential changes, which deserve proper attention for the linguist in general and the phonologist more specifically. This study describes these changes from the perspective of phonological variation in the structure of the receptor language. The study carries on potential patterns underlying the appropriation of English proper names and the process leading to it. The said process involves three major steps, i.e., perception, restructuration, appropriation, and lastly phonological variation. It follows that Masa speakers do not replicate the perceived foreign sound but restructure and/or reorganize the names to suit the sound system of their native language.

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I. INTRODUCTION

There has never been more movement of people and goods in the world in our days than ever before. Current reasons foregrounding these movements have superseded the old desire for exploration and the imperialistic ambitions nurtured by western countries. Today many people travel for tourism, studies, education, business, and many other reasons. These movements have brought about unprecedented contacts between languages and cultures. As a result, host languages have witnessed new entries in their lexicon with foreign flavours in their frames. In this respect, in the 1920s a number of American missionaries from the Lutheran Brethren Church were deployed to Sudan and neighbouring countries including Cameroon following the records of Missionaries to Sudan (1952). Some of these missionaries settled in and around Yagoua, a town in the Far North Region of Cameroon, which hosts native Masa people. These missionaries were moved by the desire to rescue their target population from the tyranny of evil and various demonic practices, which plighted the native local population.

In their efforts to convert Masa people to Christianity, the missionaries presented them the message of the new faith in Jesus Christ as penned up in the best seller religious book, the Bible. Those who

accepted the new faith were given biblical new names by which they were to be called from the date of their conversion. These names prevailed over the forenames of the converts. From the date of their conversion, the adepts were called by those new names to mark disruption from their former traditional practices and beliefs. Since the missionaries themselves were native English speakers; they named their hosts by English names. These names included Luke, Joseph, Stephen, Peter, Isaiah, Elisha, Daniel, Jacob, Moses, Jonas, Mathew, Mark, Jude, Jonas etc.

Every convert took the new name with a lot of enthusiasm. However, the reproduction of those names by these native Masa people met with the reality of their own native speech sound system. The English names had to go through the scrutiny of the native speech to be made suitable to the host sound system. This very scrutiny process with the resulting foreign sound discard and adaptation or substitution constitutes the essence of the present study. The study pays attention to the appropriation of English names in the Masa language. The study explores the changes that came along the appropriation of these names. The significance of the study lies in the fact that it draws up the patterns that underlie the appropriation of English names by the Masa people. This being said, our attention shall turn the review of related literature to account for the state of the affairs as far as loan-words in general and name related works in particular are concerned.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Language contact has been a source of enrichment for both native indigenous languages and foreign invader languages (the term "invader" should not of course be considered from a pejorative perspective). Scholars from different horizons have tarried on this issue of language contact to account for the effect of one language on another and/or some languages on the one or other language(s). In this respect, Kouega (1998) took up loans in the English from indigenous languages in a view to examine how these languages have contributed to frame the local English language variety. In a similar vein, Zang Zang (1999) investigates loans in the French language to bring out foreign concept in the latter. From a broader view, Echu (2003) shows interest in lexical appropriation not only in one language but in both official languages of Cameroon namely English and French. After these

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pioneering works, other investigations have been carried out, which should be reviewed as well.

Tamfuh (2020) explores neologism in Camerron English with the purpose of getting to the arguments foregrounding the essence of creation, coinage and formation of new words in Cameroon English. The findings of the study show that dialectal and cultural borrowing, which result in self-explained compounds, neologism, eponym and the like, characterize the said neologism. Parallely, Safatso (2020) examines neologisms and Cameroonisms in two major varieties of English namely Cameroon English and Cameroon Francophone English and comes up with the conclusion that these neologisms originate from Pidgin English while Cameroonisms trace their sources from the local languages of the nation. It is evident that the study takes appropriation from the perspective of the foreign language intake rather than the native languages, which interestingly display pertinent findings in linguistic studies. From the foregoing, it follows that language contact research is replete significant findings especially when we look at the issue from the perspective of lexical borrowing. We may not have enough time to expand on Kouega (2005), (2017), Fossi (2012), Lusekelo (2018) etc.

From the perspective of native language foreign word intake, there is a dearth of works on loanwords in local native languages. This notwithstanding, Nkongho (2019) was interested in loanwords, in the Ejagham language. The study traces the origin of the loanwords from not only one language but three Indo-European languages: English, French and German. The findings show that the said loanwords undergo phonological and morphological changes to suit the phonetic and syllable structure of the recipient language. Contrary to the situation in the nation, neighbouring Nigeria seems quite prolific in this area of language study. Salim (1981), Baldi (1995), Bagari (1985), Abubakar (2015) are some of the works that have been carried out along these lines. Each of the works cited above led to a number of findings, which shall not be discussed here. We shall shift interest to spell out the methodology on which the present work was grounded.

III. METHODOLOGY

This sub-section concerns itself with the aim of the study, the target population, the procedure and the analysis.

a) *The aim of the study*

This paper examines the structure of adopted English names in the Masana language. The study provides a descriptive view of the appropriation of names focusing on the phonological changes of proper names as they move from English, the source language to Masana, the receptor indigenous language.

b) *The target population*

The ethnic group involved in the study is the Masa people also known as Masana. The Masa occupy the eastern part of the Far North Region of Cameroon and the Mayo Kebi of the Southern part of the Chadian Republic. The Masa speak Masana, one of the Chadic languages, which include among other ethnic groups, Tupuri, Musgum, Kotoko, etc. From this target population, the sample population consists of Christians of the Cameroon branch of the Fergus Falls home-based Lutheran Brethren Church, which by the way has lasted in the country for more than a hundred years already.

c) *The procedure of data collection*

The data collected for the study are from two sources. One has to do with observation. The researcher has witnessed instances of English proper name apostrophes among speakers of Masana. Almost every appropriated English proper name in the Masana language is phonologically at variance with its original English phonological form. In order words, the foreign name (of English origin) goes through a restructuring process and ends up featuring differently in the target Masana language. This process appears appealing to the linguist and as such deserves proper analysis, which by the way is the concern of this study.

IV. THE ANALYSIS

The frame of analysis adopted in the study is based on Labov's (1994) linguistic change with an application oriented towards Foulkes (2006). The analysis consists of a comparison made between the phonological structure of source language name and that of the target language equivalent form. In other words, the names are associated with their equivalent transcription to highlight the potential changes that occur as these names enter the Masana language. Attention is paid to the adapted or appropriated form in the target language, Masana. As far as possible, similar structures are classified together to make the analysis less annoying and more apt to be grasped by the reader. The presentation and analyses move from minor changes to major ones.

Table 1: Minor dual feature change pattern

No.	Name	RP rendition	Appropriated name	Rendition	Changes	
					Feature	Structure
1	Peter	/ˈpɪtə/	Peter	/pɛtɛr/	1	1
2	Esther	/ˈɛstə/	Esther	/ɛstɛr/	-	1
3	Robert	/ˈrɒbət/	Robert	/rɒbɛr/	1	-
Percentage					33.33	33.33

There are two major levels of analysis in the appropriated forms in Table 1 above: feature and structure.

The feature and the structure element score 33.33% each. In terms of orthographic form, the appropriated name remains the same. Change occurs when it comes to the phonological rendition of the appropriated name. In each case, the changes touch on CV-CV to CV-CVC for Peter, VC-CV to VC-CVC for Esther, and maintains the structure in CV-CVC in both the original and appropriator Masana language rendition.

single segments, that is the nucleus for “Peter” rendered in RP as /ˈpɪtə/ reproduced in Masana as /pɛtɛr/. The other names display variation with the original name only in terms of the rendition of the final roll sound /r/, which is pronounced in the appropriating Masana speech. This rendition of the final roll also brings about variation in structure moving from the original:

Table 2: The internal feature pattern

No.	Name	RP rendition	Appropriated name	Rendition	Feature
1	Silas	/ˈsaɪləs/	Silas	/sɪlæs/	2
2	Titus	/ˈtɪtəs/	Titus	/tɪtus/	2
3	Moses	/ˈmoʊzəs/	Musus	/musus/	1
Percentage					83.33

The second trend in the appropriation of English names by Masa people take into account names with almost the same orthographic forms as in the previous case. Unlike the first case, the rendition in the appropriated form displays variation in the quality of the nucleus of the stressed syllable in the English name. The appropriator language Masana first blots out stress and levels the rendition causing the tense nucleiuses to

become lax as shown in Table 2 above. The resulting process is that all initial diphthongs become monophthongs. It follows that Masa people forego the whole issue of stress and its diphthongal effect on the nucleus and reduce the appropriated name to a flat stressless pattern to suit the receptor Masa rendition. We deem this pattern should be labelled the within word or internal pattern.

Table 3: The structure lengthening pattern

No.	Name	RP rendition	Appropriated name	Rendition	Structure
1	John	/ˈdʒɔn/	Yohona	/jɔhɔnæ/	2
2	Mark	/mɑk/	Markus	/mærkus/	2
3	Matthew	/mæθɪw/	/Matewus/	/mætɛwus/	2
4	Luke	/lu:k/	/Lukas/	/lukæs/	1
5	Paul	/pɔl/	Paulus	/paʊlus/	1
Percentage					90

Table 3 shows a very high degree of changes at the level of structure situated at 90%. All the appropriated names in Table 3 display more orthographic forms compared to their original English counterparts. The same numerical increase is noticed at the syllabic level. A one-to-one comparison can be made as recapitulated below:

1. /ˈdʒɔn/ CVC (one syllable) to /jɔhɔnæ/ CV-CV-CV (three syllables)
2. /mɑk/ CVS (one syllable) to /mærkus/ CVC-CVC (two syllables)

3. /mæθɪw/ CV-CVC (two syllables) to /mætɛwus/ CV-CV-CVC (three syllables)
4. /lu:k/ CVC (one syllable) to /lukæs/ CV-CVC (two syllables)
5. /pɔl/ CVC (one syllable) to /paʊlus/ CV-CVC (two syllables).

In all five appropriated names, the number of syllables has increased either by one or two. Not one name has been shortened by any means as far the number of syllables is concerned. From the foregoing changes, it can be concluded that the appropriation of

English names in Masana requires the lengthening of the initial form in the target language.

Table 4: The initial sound change pattern

No.	Name	RP rendition	Appropriated name	New rendition
1	John	/ˈdʒɔn/	Yohona	/jɔhɔnæ/
2	Jude	/dʒud/	Yudas	/judæs/
3	Jonas	/ˈdʒɔnə/	Yunas	/junæs/
4	Jesus	/ˈdʒizəs/	Yesu	/jesu/
5	Joseph	/dʒəʊzɪf/	Yusef	/jusɛf/
Percentage				100

Table 4 displays a systematic substitution of the initial voiced palatal sound /dʒ/ by the semi-vowel /j/ sound. Irrespective of whatever letter follows the /dʒ/, there is a systematic replacement of the sound. A look at the orthographic forms also show that the “y” letter

serves as a perfect substitute for the “j” letter of the initial English name. It can be concluded that the appropriation of initial /dʒ/ names compels a systematic substitution of the latter by the /j/ sound in the receptor’s speech.

Table 5: The epenthetic structural pattern

No.	Name	RP rendition	Appropriated name	New rendition	Structure
1	Stephen	/ˈstɪvən/	Estephanus	/ɛstɛfænus/	2
2	Cathryn	/ˈkætrɪn/	Caterin	/kætɛrɪn/	1
Percentage					150

Table 5 shows changes at both the orthographic and structural level. As far as the proper epenthetic feature is concerned, there are two instances. The first name “Stephen” witnesses an additional structure at both word beginning and word end. The second displays an additional split sound in the original /ˈkætrɪn/ realization to give room for a /kætɛrɪn/ realization in the appropriated form. These epenthetic changes cause an increase in the number of syllables in the Masana language.

process can be associated the inner feature pattern, which does not impact the length of the word but only touches on the nucleuses of the syllables.

Secondly, we noticed that appropriated names in Masa are longer compared to their English original names. The lengthening at times becomes twice longer than the English original name. It should be noted that ease in sound patterning could be the driving force in the reshaping of the structure. In other words, the structural changes in the appropriated form are grounded in this native sound patterning. The appropriated name undergoes different reframing patterns including insertion of new nucleuses, and epenthetic formations. It follows that English Christian names do not remain the same when appropriated by the Masa people. They do witness changes. The changes are often quite extensive that one wonders whether the newly formed names still have something to do with the English original name. This is the case for Estephanus, Yohona, Musus, Yudas, which are all reframed forms of the English names Stephen, John, Moses, and Jude respectively. In these changes, we can see the interesting effect of sound patterning operating in the process of appropriating names from the English language. It is therefore not enough for speakers of two different language to meet for proper transfer of names from one language to another. The receptor language always ends up playing a significant role on the appropriated names.

V. DISCUSSIONS

From the foregoing analysis, there are a number of striking patterns in the process of appropriating English names by Masa people. In the first place, some changes come into play notably with the loss of tensity to the profit of laxity and vice - versa. These changes may account to some extent for the inexistence of diphthongs in the Masana language. Vowel sounds do lengthen in Masana but there are no association of two different monophthongal vowel sounds in the language to make up a single sound as it is the case in the English language. Because of this difference in Masana, appropriated English names undergo changes to suit the sound system of the receptor language. Another issue which should be pointed out is that of the discrepancy between the two languages. English is characterized by stress while Masana does not witness the existence of weak and strong syllables. All syllables sound equal in words except for the lengthening of the nucleuses of some syllables, which do not that much establish a hierarchy between syllables in Masana. This

Thirdly, there are many language-specific constraints that would always monitor movement of names from one language to another. These constraints

may bring about substitution of sounds wherever a foreign sound is nowhere to be found in the receptor language. That is what explains the substitution of the /dʒud/, /'dʒʌʊn/, /'dʒʌʊnəs/, /dʒəʊzɪf/, /'dʒizəs/ for /judæs/, /jʊhɒnæ/, /junæs/, /jusef/, and /jesu/ respectively. Such are the major traits in the appropriation of English names by the Masa people. There should be many other phonological features tied to the appropriation of names in the Masana language, which are not addressed in this paper. Other endeavours may consider looking into the issue for a better grasp of the appropriation process in Masana or any other language in contact with English.

VI. CONCLUSION

Contact between peoples come along with changes in the structures of their different languages. No language seems to be strong enough to completely discard features of a foreign language from its structure. Considering the case of English and Masana, we saw that Masana did appropriate English proper names from American native English speakers. In the appropriation of those foreign names, the Masa language monitored the passage of the these proper into their language through a number of changes including feature changes, structural changes and epenthetic changes. Some of these changes include interesting transformations in names such as “Musus”, “Yohona”, “Yudas”, Estephanus, which are derived from the English names “Moses”, “John”, and “Jude” and Stephen respectively.

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