

A Study of the History and Structure of Naijá Words

David Oshorenoya Esizimotor

Institute of African Studies

University of Ibadan, Nigeria

E-mail: davidesizimotor@gmail.com

Tel: +234 803 542 7115

OPENING REMARKS

- This study examines some of the major sources, development and stock of words in Naijá
- To describe the patterns and traces of contact in the lexicon of Naija, we sought to do three things:
 - I. probe the history of the language
 - II. categorise the stock of words in the language based on their relative periods of historical evolution
 - III. and describe in a very minimal way the structure of some words in the lexicon
- For our statistical analysis, we relied on a 700-word lexicon of commonly used Naijá words sourced from a small corpus of advertisements, conversations and poetry in the last 4 decades

BACKGROUND

- Naijá is a pidgin/creole language that evolved from the extended contact between visiting groups of Europeans and the Natives of Niger Delta.
- Now the Niger Delta is an area that is geographically and linguistically diverse, with over 20 distinct languages and a population well above 20 million today.
- Of the three major language phyla in Nigeria, the region is home to only the Niger-Congo language phylum, with only three of its sub-phyla represented in the region viz: West Benue-Congo languages, Cross River languages (Annang, Efik, Eket, Ibibio, Ogoni etc) and Atlantic languages (Izon, Kalabari, Okrika etc) (Williamson and Blench 2000).
- The linguistic development of Naijá evolved across three major historical eras viz:
 - the era of Portuguese Influence in the Niger Delta
 - the era of English Influence in the Niger Delta
 - the era of the spread of the language across Nigeria (Esizimotor 2009)

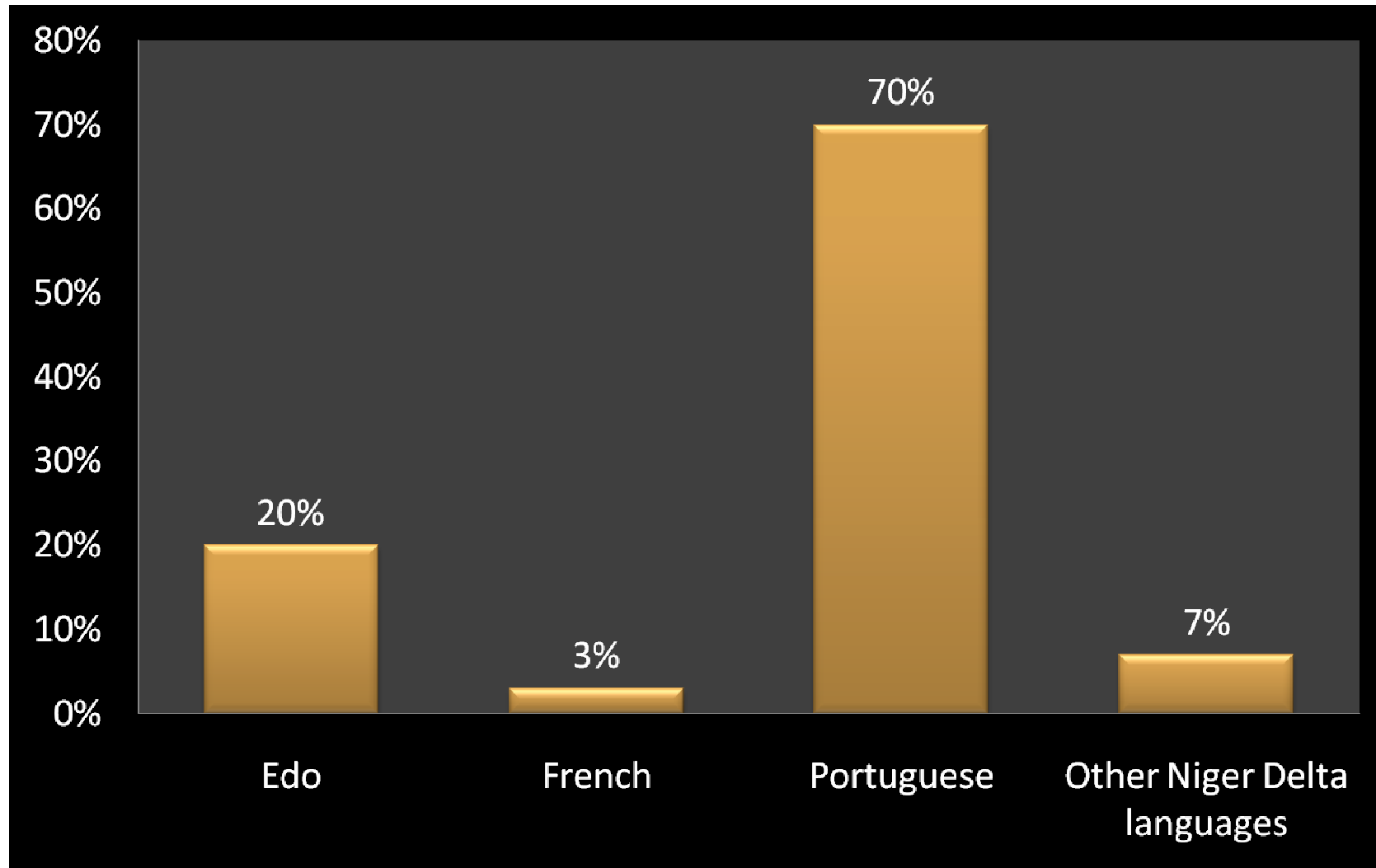
HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF NAIJÁ

Era of Portuguese Influence 1469 - 1700	Era of English Influence 1701 -1900	Era of the Spread of the Language in Nigeria 1901 – till date
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1469AD - Portuguese arrive in the Niger Delta• The Portuguese set up schools, Churches and trade posts in Benin, Itsekiri land and in the Coastal Niger Delta• Late 1400s – Formation of the early PB Naijá• Early 1500s - The discovery and withdrawal of Portuguese to Sao Tome & Principe• Late 1500s - Other Europeans: The Dutch and French also visited and did business in ND• 1600s – The stabilisation of PB Naijá• Late 1700s - Stock of words in PB Naijá words hits about 1000	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1650 AD - The English arrive in the Niger Delta.• 1700 AD - The English began to gain some foothold in the Niger Delta.• 1700s - The relexification of PB Naijá and the pidginisation of English begins• Late 1700s – The English set up schools, conduct missionary activities, create protectorates and conduct business in the slave coasts and in the oil rivers of the Niger Delta• Early 1800s – EB Naijá stabilises and expands• Late 1800s - Stock of words in EB Naijá hits 2000 words	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1900AD – EB Naijá begins spread across Nigeria• Naijá arrives in Lagos and other trade centres in Nigeria & acquires national vocabulary• Mid 1900s – Naijá begins to show signs of creolisation• 1970s – 80s - Afrobeat helps the lexicon and spreads language among the youthful population of Nigeria• 2000 AD till date – Naijá spreads to other parts of Africa and Diaspora via Nigerian music, movies and comedies• 2000AD - Stock of words in Naijá rises above 5000 words

SOME STOCK OF WORDS IN PORTUGUESE-BASED NAIJÁ 1469 - 1700

Item	PB Naijá	Gloss	Word source	Source Language
1	alele	start moving, to move or do something quickly	aller - to go	French
2	boku	many, much	beaucoup - much	French
3	dash/das	give, donate, gift	dar - give	Portuguese
4	dede	embrace, term for welcome	dèdè - embrace	Edo
5	golo	search, look for, dig	gualo - to look for	Edo
6	igbe	body	egbe - body	Edo
7	kpalava	trouble, so much talk	palavras - words	Portuguese
8	kpotoki	a Portuguese, a white man	Português	Portuguese
9	kuye/ekuye	spoon	colher -spoon	Portuguese
10	lele	accompany, follow	lèlé - follow	Edo
11	na	It is, is	na - this	Edo
12	peti	little (items)	petit - small	French
13	pikin	child	pequeno - little	Portuguese
14	payan	inferior, useless, insignificant	banal - trivial, insignificant	Portuguese
15	potopoto	mud, muddy water, ideophone for muddiness	potopoto - ideophone for drenching	Izon
16	sabi/sebe	know, understand	saber - know	Portuguese

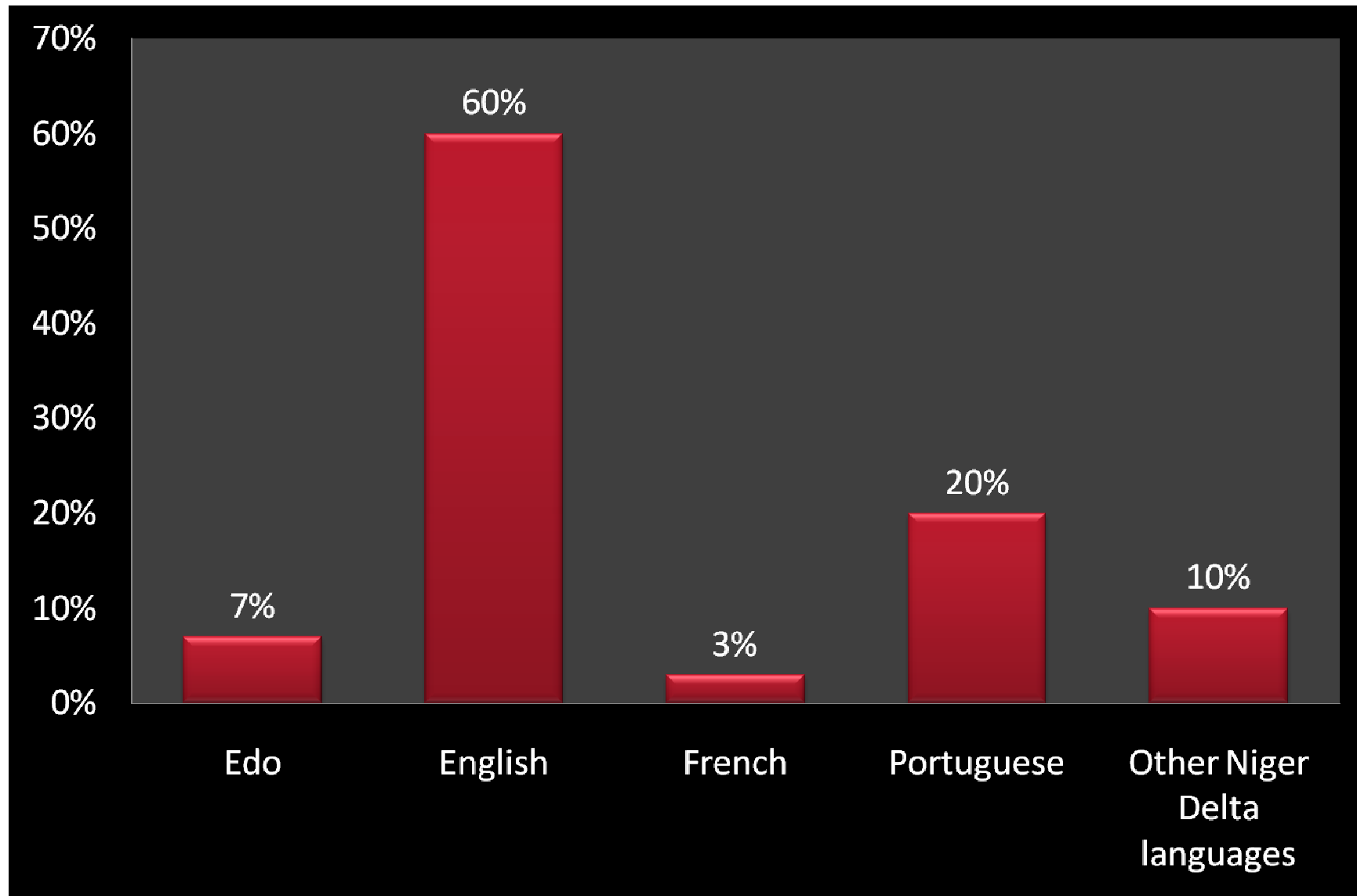
PERCENTAGE OF LEXIFICATION IN PORTUGUESE-BASED NAIJÁ 1469 - 1700



SOME STOCK OF WORDS IN ENGLISH-BASED NAIJÁ 1701 - 1900

Item	EB-Naijá	Gloss	Word source	Source Language
1	am	it/him	am	English
2	broda	a christian brother	brother	English
3	de	progressive marker	de 'come'	Edo
4	dem	they/them, plural marker	them	English
5	doo	sorry, expression of compliment	doo 'expression of compliment'	Edo, Urhobo, Isoko
6	doti	filth	dirt	English
7	domot	entrance/verandah	door mouth	English
8	gó	to go	go	English
9	im	him/his/her/its	him	English
10	kenu	a boat	canoe	English
11	kpangolo	tin/container	kpa in agolo 'to click open up a metal container'	Edo
12	kom	come/then	come	English
13	komot	come out/go away	come out	English
14	mi	me	me	English
15	na	is/it is	na 'this'	Edo
16	una	you (pl.)	unu - you people	Igbo
17	waka	walk	walk	English
18	yu	you (sg.)	you	English

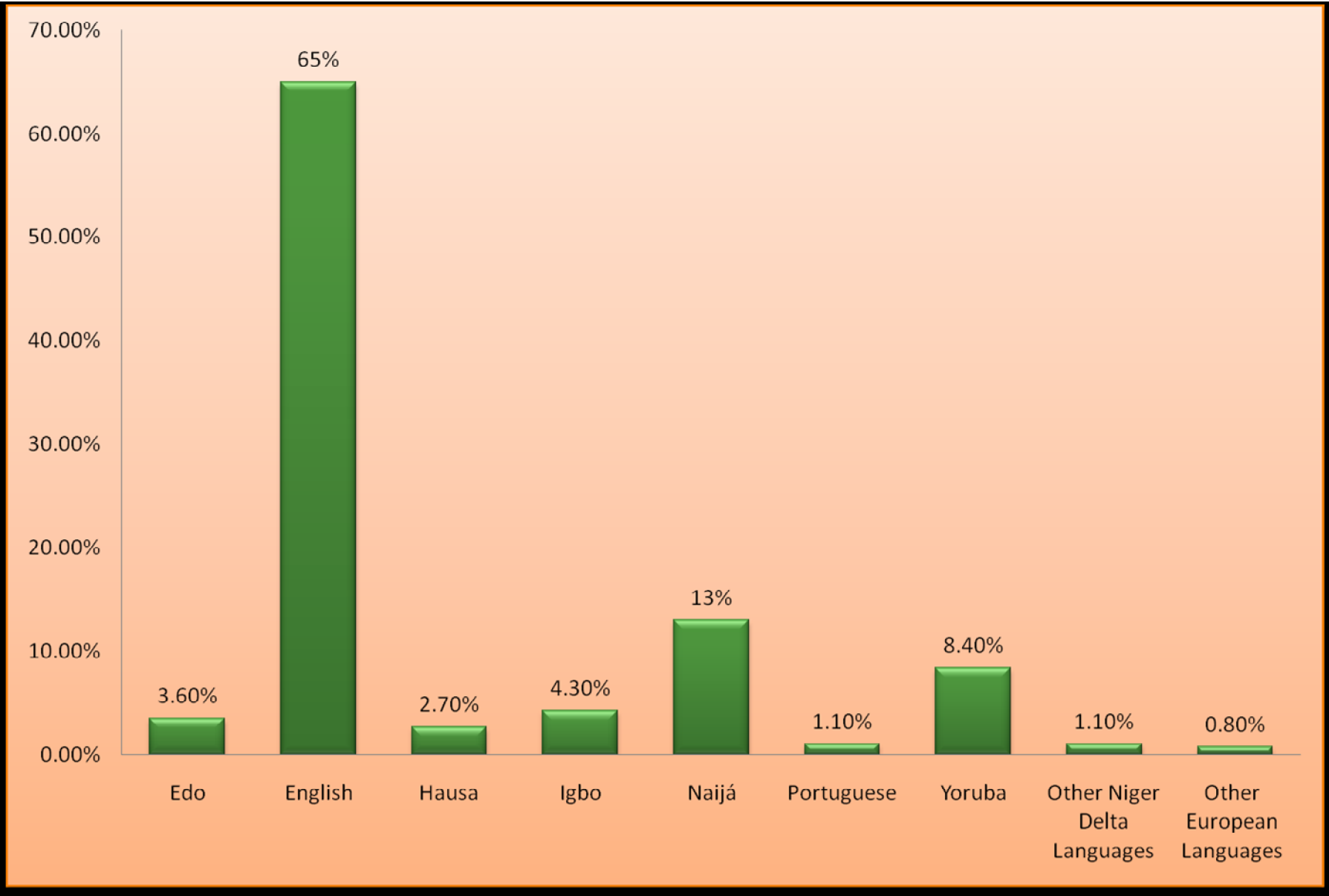
PERCENTAGE OF LEXIFICATION IN ENGLISH-BASED NAIJÁ 1701 - 1900



COUNTRYWIDE STOCK OF WORDS IN MODERN ENGLISH-BASED NAIJÁ 1901 - DATE

Item	Naijá	Gloss	Source Language
1	abi	isn't it/haven't you/wont you?	Yoruba
2	abuna	thing, male or female genitals	Hausa
3	agbo	traditional herbal remedy for fever, diarrheal etc	Yoruba
4	ajebota	someone born into wealth, a pampered child	Yoruba
5	ajekpako	someone born into poverty, someone with a difficult life	Yoruba
6	akamu	pap made from maize	Igbo
7	akara	fried bean cake	Yoruba
8	akpu	pounded meal prepared from soaked cassava stem	Igbo
9	barawo	a thief	Hausa
10	banga	palm tree, palm oil	Igbo
11	dodo	fried ripe plantain	Yoruba
12	gworu	kolanut	Hausa
13	kamkpe	solid/unshakeable/real good	Yoruba
14	ogbonge	solid, authentic	Igbo
15	shakara	pride	Yoruba
16	suya	spicy, barbecued beef	Hausa
17	una	you, 2nd person plural pronoun	Igbo
18	yanga	pride	Igbo

PERCENTAGE OF LEXIFICATION IN MODERN ENGLISH-BASED NAIJÁ 1901 - DATE



STRUCTURE OF NAIJA WORDS

- By examining the structure of Naijá words our intention is to get an overview of how much of the morphological structure of Naijá words have been influenced by its lexifying languages.
- Borrowing is one of the commonest means for the linguistic enrichment of the languages at contact accounting for as much as 50 percent of the words in a pidgin/creole.
- While borrowing accounts for the external enrichment of a language, derivation provides the internal mechanism or structure for the lexical evolution and expansion of a language.
- So our concern here is to explore how the words that came into the language largely through borrowing further evolved into new words via derivation.
- There are at least four structural processes in which words in contact languages may be derived; they include **affixation**, **compounding**, **reduplication** and **zero-derivation** (Plag 2004, 4).

Affixation

- **Affixation** in Naijá is a fairly recent derivative process acquired from English in the second era of its development.
- The addition of derivational suffixes to a group of common core Naijá words ending in <ak> , <ab> or <ok> exemplifies this.

(a) word	gloss	(b) word	Gloss
rak (verb)	'to fight'	rak·is (noun)	'a fight'
shak (verb)	'to drink alcohol'	shak·is (noun)	'alcoholic drink(s)'
wak (verb)	'to eat a meal'	wak·is (noun)	'a meal'
yab (verb)	'to tease'	yab·is (noun)	'a teasing bout'
grab (adjective)	'muscular'	grab·is (noun)	'a muscular person'
sok (verb)	'to soak'	sok·is (noun)	'garri soaked in water'

Compounding

- **Compounding is also** a fairly recent development in Naijá date to the second era of the development of the language.
- It is an effective way of forming new words in Naijá even when the root morphemes are sourced from different contributing languages.
- Compounding accounts for 8 percent of the common core words in Naijá today

<i>compound</i>	<i>source language</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
boku bai	French + English	‘wholesale’
egbe weja	Edo + English	‘a bouncer at a club, a thug or hoodlum’
go slo	English + English	‘traffic jam’
strong hed	English + English	‘stubbornness’
ke leg	English + English	‘rickets’
oga kpatapata	Igbo+Yoruba	‘an overall boss or leader’
oga madam	Igbo+English	‘a female boss, the boss’s wife’
ova sabi	English+Portuguese	‘one who shows he knows too much’
akara woman	Igbo+English	‘a women who fries and sells bean cakes’

Reduplication

- **Reduplication** is another active word formation process in Naijá, account for as much as 10 percent of the common core Naija words.
- It is one of the oldest of the word formation processes in the language, influenced by the languages of the Niger Delta in the first era of the development of Naijá.
- It can apply to potentially all words in the language whatever their origin.

<i>reduplication</i>	<i>source language</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
ale·le	French	'to move quickly'
poto·poto	Izon	'mud, muddy water'
boku·boku	French	'in large number'
krai·krai	English	'someone who cries frequently'
kpata·kpata	Yoruba	'completely'
nau·nau	English	'right now; quickly'
padi·padi	English	'on very friendly basis'
sabi·sabi	Portuguese	'someone who thinks he or she knows everything'
waka·waka	English	'someone who moves about frequently'
wuru·wuru	Hausa	'deceitful'
za·za·za	Edo	'with immediate dispatch; done as fast as possible'

Zero derivation

- **Zero derivation** is a very active word building process in Naijá, accounting for as much 10 percent of the words in the language.
- It is one of the oldest of the word formation processes in the language, influenced by the languages of the Niger Delta in the first era of the development of Naijá.
- It can apply to potentially all words in the language whatever their origin or how they were previously derived.

(a) word	<i>gloss</i>	(b) word	<i>gloss</i>	<i>Source language</i>
baz (verb)	'to smoke'	baz (noun)	'a stick of cigarette'	English
bulala (verb)	'to flog'	bulala (noun)	'a cane or whip'	Naijá
dagbo (verb)	'to fake a document'	dagbo (noun)	'a fake document'	[probably Yoruba]
mayan (verb)	'to drink alcohol'	mayan (noun)	'alcoholic drinks'	Igbo
moi-moi (noun)	'cooked bean pie'	moi-moi (adjective)	'cheap, of no significance'	Yoruba
mago-mago (noun)	'deceit'	mago-mago (adjective)	'deceitful'	Hausa

CONCLUSION

- In the evolution of Naijá in the last 500 years, the language has evolved from a Portuguese-based pidgin to an English based creole
- The stock of words in the language has greatly swelled and benefited from the contribution of its superstrate and substrate lexifiers across three historical eras.
- While the bulk of the stock of words in Naijá have come from European lexifiers across all three historical eras, a significant others came through the languages of the Niger Delta, as well as from other Nigerian languages.
- There are four structurally active derivational processes in force in Naijá, affixation, compounding, reduplication and zero-derivation.
- While affixation and compounding are fairly recent developments in the language, reduplication and zero-derivation are among the oldest processes of word formation in Naijá

Mai pipul, una do o!