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A Study of Disappearing Words in Contemporary Kanuri

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Abstract: This paper examines the phenomenon of disappearance of words in contemporary Kanuri. However, it is known facts that language continues to grow, its word stock continues to change. As new words are added to meet new needs, concepts or ideas, others sink into disuses and eventually disappear. This paper examines the latter phenomenon, i.e., that of word loss or disappearance. It describes and analyses an inventory of disappearing Kanuri words in contemporary period. The second part examines the subject of word loss. The third part sets up a typology based on which disappearing words can be analysed; and finally, the fifth part concludes the paper. The data for this paper were derived from two main sources: one, English-Kanuri and Kanuri-English Dictionaries and two, questionnaires filled out by 50 adult Kanuri respondents comprising Male (30) and Female (20) with ages ranging from 25 to 55: The data were then put to a number of texts to determine the frequency count to which these words were use or unused.

Keywords: Disappearing Words, Words Loss, Words Falling into Disuse and Linguistic Borrowing

Kanuri is a Nilo-Saharan language that is spoken as language of the immediate his community in Borno, Yobe and Jigawa States of Nigeria and some parts of the Niger Republic. Kanuri, like other languages, also has its varieties; the difference is that the sociolinguistics stigma attached to speakers of some dialects in European languages is not known in Kanuri. Dialect variation in Kanuri was recognized by early scholars such as Koelle (1854) who noted four variants; viz: Kanuri, Munio (Manga), Nguru and Kanøm. Since Koelle's time to this time, no comprehensive Kanuri dialect study was done. However, a more systematic study of Kanuri dialects was presented in the works of Bulakarima (1987 and 2001), Hutchison (1981, 1985 and 1990) and a host of others whose works concentrated on individual dialects.



The dialect used for this study was mainly people living in and around Maiduguri but some of whom are not necessarily speakers of Yerwa dialect. The study, in other words, is largely based on the Yerwa dialect. As such, the findings would likely reveal changes affecting Yerwa dialect in general. The aim of this paper is to study the Disappearing words in contemporary Kanuri using the method employed in Isa (2002). When analyzing Hausa Disappearing words, Isa (2002:10) describes the phenomenon of lexical disappearances in Hausa. Here, the same method would be applied in the describing disappearing words in contemporary Kanuri.

Word Loss

The concept word loss falls under language death or change, a subfield of historical linguistics Crystal (2008:122) refers to the gradual disappearance of a word from word stock of a language. This is most important in situations where the referent of a particular word ceases to exist or be used. When this happens, the affected word does not just disappear in a flash. It rather remains in written records, especially dictionaries as an archive of some past culture and also in people memory. Gradually, however people come to forget this word due to prolonged disuse. According to Aitchison (1991:117) word loss is to the notion of need. When a word is no longer used in a language, it drops out.

Kanuri, been one of the best documented language, various issues of language change has been documented (i.e. phonological adaptation and incorporation of Arabic Loans Baldi 1991, Rothmaler 2006). However, the study of the changes in vocabulary has focussed mainly on linguistics borrowing and therefore on the enlargement on the Kanuri lexicon. Not study, to our knowledge, has focussed on the issue of word loss. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to fill this vacuum by studying lexical loss.

A Typology of Disappearing Words

The typology here categorized Kanuri words into three based on the extent of their disappearance. The first category is of words are those whose frequency of use is on the decline. That is, the words are not used as frequently as before, as a result of which they are now potentially endangered. Consider these:

Potentially endangered words:

Ex.1: Words	Gloss	Preferred Synonym
a. <i>Masəwa</i>	kerosene lamp	<i>fatəla</i>
b. <i>Bəmbə</i>	shackles, fetters either for the wrist	



	or ankle'	<i>salala</i>
c. <i>Kore</i>	gown	<i>kulwu</i>
d. <i>Təgəm</i>	breast, chest	<i>nganji</i>
e. <i>Anza</i>	things or materials	<i>kare</i>
f. <i>Arre</i>	old cloth	<i>dina</i>

It should be noted that each of the words in the first column in (1) has a synonym. The reason for preferring the latter to the former is still unclear, even though the referent in each case is almost the same. However, one may speculate that the preference for modern borrowed words is the cause of this phenomenon.

Occupational/ Professional Words

The second category of this typology consists of words that are seldom used in Kanuri except in strict occupational or professional settings. Due to their restricted use, we may refer to them as passive words, which Kanuri speakers may understand or recognize, though they do not feature in everyday usage.

Ex. 2: Words

Gloss

a. <i>Talaki</i>	a type of colour (black)
b. <i>Tintilo</i>	a type of colour (blue)
c. <i>Alikolo</i>	a type of cap
d. <i>Duria</i>	a type of cloth for female (in palace)
e. <i>Dərwali</i>	a type of trouser
f. <i>Fatoma səmoa</i>	a type of cap
g. <i>Fəjaria</i>	a type of hair do
h. <i>Duwawa</i>	a type of hair does for cucumber

It will be noted that majority of the words in (2) are words with some specialized meaning or referent, in that they are mostly occupational.

Words Falling into Disuse

The third category of this typology consists of words that have virtually fallen into disuse. Prototypical of such words are:

Ex. 3: Words

Gloss

a. <i>Zarara</i>	baton
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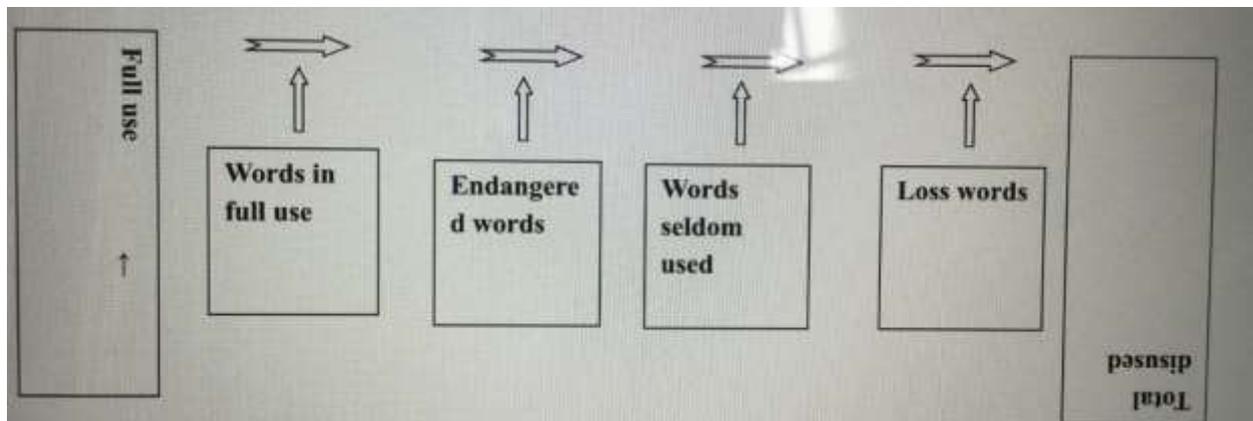
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- b. *Kokowomi* spoon
- c. *Zuwa* cotton board
- d. *Fatale/ Nuru* bed sheet
- e. *Njongo* nipple
- d. *fangal* branch
- e. *Kare* an old broken pot
- f. *Təgəm* breast

There are two pieces of evidence testifying to the status of these words as lost. One is that only a few of them are known to the youngest generations of 35 years and below. The second is that they are found only in dictionaries or in some fixed frozen expressions such as proverbs or idioms.

Stages of Word Disappearance:

1.3 Stages of Word Disappearance:



Adopted from Isa (2002:53)

According to this sketch word may not necessarily go through the stage of being endangered in order for it to be go from full use to total disuse.

Reason for Word Loss

This sub-heading attempts to explain how words are drop-off or loss in Kanuri language.

Socio- Historical Factor

Word loss can be attributed to three causes. The first cause a socio- historical factor which involves



the changing mode of life of the Kanuri people. This changes, which affects every aspect of Kanuri life, results in the evolution of new words to meet new needs and the loss of other words whose referents have perished or disappeared. Similarly, modern transportation and freight system which has virtually replaced the traditional system is directly responsible for the gradual disuse of word.

Linguistic Borrowing

The second cause of word loss in Kanuri is linguistics borrowing (for systematic analysis of borrowing in Kanuri, (cf Baldi 1991, 1992, Dikwa 2007 and Abdullahi 2013). It is natural that when two words exist alongside each other, one word disappears partially or completely in favour of other. In our own case here, it is normally the native words that disappear in favour of the borrowed word. In a few cases, an older Kanurized loan word gives way to a new one. Consider (older) Kanuri words exterminated by (new) loan words such as below:

Ex. 4: Exterminated Word	Loan Word Replacement	Gloss
a. <i>Angale</i> (English)	<i>foli/tafa</i>	cigarette
b. <i>Haatim</i> (Arabic)	<i>tawaa</i>	postal stamp
c. <i>Sundunk</i> (Arabic)	<i>sanduwu</i>	box

From the foregoing it is possible that the use of the loan words is deliberate so as to exhibit on air of modernity and sophistication, i.e. suggesting that the user known English or Arabic. However, that may not explain the phenomenon completely because some of the exterminated words are themselves loan words example *hatim* and *sanduwu* are from Arabic. The following examples are in loan word:

Ex.

5:

English	Kanuri	Gloss
a. Bic	<i>bik</i>	biro
b. Carte	<i>karta/karda</i>	card (playing)
c. Kilo	<i>kilo</i>	kilo
d. Hotel	<i>fotel/otel</i>	restaurant/ hotel
e. Body	<i>bidi</i>	van/ pick- up
f. Madam	<i>madam</i>	madam
g. Passport	<i>fasfo</i>	passport



This paper has described the phenomenon of lexical disappearance in Kanuri. Its primary finding is that within the last generation, a number of words have either partially or completely disappeared from the language. These changes can be attributed to the life style of the Kanuri people, internal language change and linguistic borrowing. One area in which the paper hope to leave a mark is the area of lexicography. Quite often, Kanuri dictionaries give word list and meaning and example of usage.

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