

Phonological Adaptation of Medical and Covid-19 Loanwords in the Tiv Language

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Abstract

The outbreak of Corona Virus (Covid-19), which began in Wuhan China, sent frightening waves across the globe. As a measure to control its spread, medical doctors devised means to communicate to the world. This outbreak gave rise to the adaptation of loanwords in the various languages of the world. The paper explores phonological adaptation of medical and COVID-19 loanwords in the Tiv language. The study aims to examine the phonological adaptation of medical and COVID-19-related loanwords in the Tiv language, with a focus on how these borrowed terms are integrated into Tiv phonological structure. The study adopts Claude Paradis and Darlene LaCharité's Phonological Adaptation Theory (PAT). The study adopts a qualitative, descriptive research design. The study was conducted in Gwer East, Benue State with a purposive sample of 15 native Tiv speakers. Semi-structured interview, observation with note-taking were the major instruments for data collection. The study found that the Tiv language has incorporated numerous medical and COVID-19-related terms from English, such as *Virus* (Vairusu), *Vaccine* (Vasin), reflecting direct borrowing to address emerging health concepts. Phonological processes such as syncope, epenthesis, vowel lengthening, and tone adaptation were found. The study concludes that the Tiv language actively adapts and integrates foreign medical and COVID-19-related terms through systematic phonological modifications to align with its native phonotactic constraints. The paper recommends among others that language planners and educators in Tiv-speaking communities should incorporate the adapted medical and COVID-19-related loanwords into formal language teaching and health communication materials to enhance comprehension and usage.

Keywords: Phonological adaptation, COVID-19 loanwords, Tiv Language

Introduction

Language is a fundamental aspect of human communication and identity. According to Adegbite (2018: 28), language is a structured system of communication that embodies the cultural and social experiences of a people. This definition underscores the role of language as not just a medium of communication but a representation of societal norms and values. In the Tiv linguistic setting, language serves as a tool for interaction, transmission of heritage, and adaptation to external influences. The dynamic nature of language ensures that it evolves to accommodate changes, including lexical borrowings/loaning, which arise due to interaction with other linguistic groups.

Language contact occurs when speakers of different languages interact, leading to various linguistic outcomes. Igboanusi (2019: 4) states that language contact results in lexical borrowing, code-switching, and even language shift depending on the intensity and duration of interaction. This perspective highlights that when the Tiv language interacts with English and Hausa and other languages, it absorbs lexical items to fill gaps or accommodate new realities. Such contact is often a consequence of trade, migration, colonisation, globalisation and pandemic such as Covid-19, significantly influencing

the lexicon of indigenous languages like Tiv. This contact significantly results to loan words from both languages.

Loanwords are lexical items borrowed from one language and incorporated into another with or without phonological or morphological modification. According to Zhang Ke (2017: 1), loanwords are lexical items borrowed from a donor language and incorporated into a recipient language, often undergoing phonological, morphological, or semantic adaptation to fit the recipient language's linguistic system. The Tiv language, like many African languages, has borrowed numerous words from English and Hausa due to prolonged contact. These borrowed words usually undergo adaptation to fit the phonological and morphological structures of Tiv, thereby maintaining linguistic coherence while expanding vocabulary.

Tiv loanwords reflect the influence of external languages in various domains such as technology, governance, and everyday life. Terkimbi (2021: 9) observes that loanwords in Tiv primarily originate from English and Hausa, with notable examples including *mashin* (machine), *batur* (foreigner/white person), *gari* (cassava flour), *Telefon* (Telephone, from English), *Bateri* (Battery, from English),

Pensul (Pencil, from English), and *Diza* (Diesel, from English). These examples demonstrate how borrowed words are nativised, ensuring that they align with the phonotactics of Tiv while enriching its lexicon. The adaptation of English and Hausa words into Tiv follows systematic phonological changes. *Pensu*, borrowed from English *pencil*, exemplifies how Tiv speakers insert a final vowel to accommodate the word within the language's phonotactic constraints.

The Tiv people have actively borrowed words from the medical field to adapt them into their native language for ease of understanding. This practice became particularly significant during the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many Tiv speakers, especially in rural areas, could not understand English terminologies used in health communication. As a result, new medical vocabularies such as “sanitaiza” (from sanitizer), “kovid” (from COVID), and “vaksin” (from vaccine) were domesticated to ensure clarity. These borrowed terms helped health workers convey critical information on prevention and safety. Without such linguistic adaptation, messages on public health would have failed to reach the grassroots. Therefore, loaning became a necessary linguistic strategy to manage the pandemic effectively among the Tiv.

When words are loaned or borrowed into a language, they often undergo phonotactic constraints to fit the sound patterns of the receiving language. According to Iorngurum (2017: 56), Tiv phonotactics dictate that borrowed words conform to existing syllable structures, often leading to vowel insertion or consonant cluster simplification. This means that the borrowed words are modified to align with the permissible syllable structures, consonant clusters, and vowel combinations of the new language. For example, a word with a complex consonant cluster like “spray” may be simplified in a language that does not permit such clusters, becoming something like “sipure.” In the Tiv language, borrowed English words are often adjusted by inserting vowels or altering final consonants to suit Tiv phonology. A borrowed word like “clinic” might become “kilinik” to conform to Tiv syllable rules. These phonological changes ensure that the borrowed terms can be easily pronounced and understood by native speakers.

Phonological processes such as assimilation, deletion, and insertion are crucial in the adaptation of loanwords in Tiv. Ojong (2022: 23) states that phonological processes help borrowed words fit seamlessly into the recipient language's sound system. Assimilation in

Tiv often modifies foreign sounds to resemble native phonemes, while deletion removes syllables or sounds that do not align with Tiv phonology. For example, in the adaptation of *Telefoon* (Telephone), the long vowel is emphasised to align with Tiv phonotactics, while in *Pensu* (Pencil), a final vowel is inserted to conform to the preferred CV (consonant-vowel) structure of the language. These processes illustrate the dynamic nature of phonological adaptation in Tiv.

Major phonological processes affecting loanwords in Tiv include vowel epenthesis, consonant deletion, and tone assignment. Ugbabe (2018: 5) argues that loanword phonology in Tiv involves significant structural adjustments to align with the phonotactic constraints of the language. For example, the English word 'radio' becomes *redeyo* in Tiv due to vowel epenthesis, ensuring that the borrowed word adheres to Tiv's phonological patterns. Similarly, the English word "school" is adapted as *sikuu*, where vowel epenthesis is applied to break the consonant cluster, making the word more compatible with Tiv phonology. Torkwase (2024) concludes that the phonological reshaping of borrowed words ensures that they are seamlessly integrated into the recipient language without disrupting its natural linguistic rhythm. Tiv preserves its linguistic identity while embracing

necessary lexical expansions. Against this backdrop, the study seeks to examine a phonological study of medical/covid-19 loan words in Tiv language.

Statement of the Problem

Language is dynamic and often evolves through contact, especially during periods of crisis that demand rapid information dissemination. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic introduced a range of medical terminologies such as *quarantine*, *isolation*, *vaccine*, *sanitizer*, and *coronavirus* which posed communicative challenges for indigenous communities like the Tiv of Benue State, Nigeria. Since many Tiv speakers, particularly in rural settings, are not proficient in English, there was a need to adapt these new terms to the phonological system of the Tiv language. Consequently, these words were borrowed and phonologically modified to align with Tiv phonotactic rules, resulting in forms such as *kofid*, *vaksin*, *sanitaiza*, and *koronabairos*.

Despite the prevalence of these modified forms, there is little scholarly investigation into how such phonological changes occur, what patterns they follow, and what implications they have for language development and health communication. The lack of documented phonological analysis of these COVID-19 related loanwords in Tiv creates a gap in

understanding the linguistic strategies used by the Tiv to cope with lexical innovation during health crises. This study, therefore, seeks to examine the phonological adaptation processes of medical loanwords in the Tiv language, with particular focus on medical/COVID-19 terminology.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The study aims to examine the phonological adaptation of medical and COVID-19-related loanwords in the Tiv language. The objectives of the study are to:

1. identify common medical and COVID-19-related terms borrowed into the Tiv language.
2. analyse the phonological processes involved in adapting these loanwords to fit Tiv phonotactic rules.

Literature Review

This section reviews the key concepts and theoretical framework that form the foundation of this study

Language

Language is a fundamental aspect of human communication, shaping thought, culture, and identity. Scholars have long debated its nature, structure, and functions. Omachonu (2018: 5) asserts that “language is a structured system of communication that relies on symbols, sounds, and rules to convey meaning”. This view highlights the systematic and

rule-governed nature of language, emphasising that it is not a random collection of sounds but an organized means of conveying thoughts and ideas. Adegbite (2020: 23) posits that “language is a social tool that enables individuals to express their emotions, desires, and intentions within a given community”. This definition underscores its function in fostering interpersonal relationships and ensuring mutual understanding.

The dynamic nature of language makes it an evolving entity that changes over time to accommodate new realities. Mbah and Chukwu (2019) describes language as an evolving system that undergoes modification through contact with other languages, technological advancements, and cultural shifts. This perspective highlights that language is not static but a living entity that adapts to societal transformations. Crystal (2010) explains that language evolves through processes such as borrowing, semantic shifts, and phonological adjustments to meet the communicative needs of its users. This definition reinforces the idea that languages are constantly reshaped by external and internal influences.

Loan Words

Loan words, also referred to as lexical borrowings, are words adopted from one language into another due to linguistic contact. Scholars have defined

loan words from different perspectives, emphasising their role in language evolution. Osisanwo (2019: 23) defines loan words as the linguistic evidence of cultural and social interaction between speech communities. Loan words emerge when speakers of different languages engage in sustained contact, leading to the incorporation of foreign lexical items into the native lexicon. This assertion underscores the idea that language is dynamic and continuously evolving due to external influences. Igboanusi (2020: 4) views loan words as a necessity in linguistic expansion. According to him, languages borrow words to fill lexical gaps, especially in technological, scientific, and cultural advancements. This perspective highlights the adaptability of languages in accommodating new realities through borrowing, ensuring that linguistic communities can express emerging concepts effectively.

Without borrowing, many languages would struggle to keep pace with global developments, thereby limiting their expressive potential. Bamgbose (2018: 78) asserts that language borrowing is a product of societal multilingualism, where dominant languages influence less dominant ones through trade and governance. This definition presents loan words as markers of power dynamics and economic relationships. For example,

many African languages contain English, French, and Portuguese loan words due to colonial rule, reflecting the dominance of these colonial languages in administration and education.

Phonotactics

Phonotactics is a fundamental aspect of phonology that governs the permissible arrangements of sounds within a language. Scholars have provided varying perspectives on phonotactics, emphasising its role in linguistic structure. Akinlabi (2020: 4) defines phonotactics as the branch of phonology that studies the constraints on sound sequences in a given language. “Phonotactics determines which sound combinations are allowed and which are not within a language's phonological system” (Akinlabi, 2020: 114). This assertion highlights the structured nature of phonological systems, which differ across languages. Ndimele (2019: 98) states that phonotactics is an essential aspect of phonological competence, enabling speakers to intuitively recognise acceptable and unacceptable sound sequences. “Every language has a unique set of phonotactic rules that dictate how sounds can be arranged in syllables and words” This underscores the fact that phonotactic constraints are language-specific, shaping the pronunciation patterns of native speakers.

The significance of phonotactics in language acquisition has been widely acknowledged by linguists. Phonotactic constraints influence first-language acquisition by restricting the range of possible word formations. “Infants acquire the phonotactic patterns of their native language early in development, which helps them segment speech into meaningful units” (Chumbow, 2018: 132). This indicates that phonotactics plays a crucial role in the cognitive processing of language among infants. Likewise, Batibo (2020) contends that phonotactic rules help language learners differentiate between native and non-native word structures. Non-native phonotactic patterns are typically marked by deviations in syllable structure, leading to phonological modifications during language acquisition. This view suggests that phonotactic restrictions shape both first and second-language learning processes.

Phonological processes

Phonological processes refer to the systematic sound patterns that occur in the phonology of a language. These processes are fundamental to the organization of speech sounds and play a crucial role in phonological theory. According to Akinlabi (2017), phonological processes are essential for understanding how sounds interact within a linguistic system. Akinlabi (2017: 34) asserts that

“phonological processes are systematic modifications that speech sounds undergo in particular linguistic environments”. This means that phonological processes provide a framework through which phonemes are altered in speech production. Obeng (2020) defines phonological processes as the predictable alterations in speech that result from phonological constraints. He explains that these processes are integral to phonological systems as they help speakers produce more natural and efficient speech patterns. The predictability of these changes is what makes them a vital component of phonological structure.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts Phonological Adaptation Theory (PAT), developed by Claude Paradis and Darlene LaCharité in 1997, to analyze how loanwords are modified to fit the phonological system of the borrowing language. PAT argues that loanword adaptation is governed by phonological constraints specific to the recipient language rather than by direct phonetic imitation of the source language. The theory posits that speakers systematically restructure foreign words according to their native phonological rules, ensuring loanwords conform to native patterns. This process is categorical and rule-governed, meaning adaptations follow consistent phonological patterns

rather than gradual phonetic shifts, which explains the variation in loanword adaptations across different languages based on their unique phonotactic constraints.

Moreover, PAT emphasises the active role of the mental lexicon and phonological grammar in loanword adaptation, asserting that borrowed words are transformed through established phonological processes rather than passive phonetic perception. The theory also highlights the importance of prosodic features such as stress, syllable structure, and vowel harmony, which influence how loanwords are modified to maintain rhythmic and phonological integrity within the borrowing language. Applying PAT to this study offers a structured framework to examine how Tiv speakers adapt foreign medical terms by employing phonological processes like vowel insertion, consonant deletion, and syllable restructuring, demonstrating that loanword adaptation in Tiv is systematic and governed by its native phonological system.

Empirical Review

Aor (2021) analyses phonemic substitutions in the English-Tiv loan phonology. The main objectives of this study are to discuss vowel and consonant substitutions in the English-Tiv loan phonology and to state the implications of English-Tiv loan phonology in the study of

the Tiv grammar. This study adopts LaCharite & Paradis' (2005) phonological Repair Model and Calabrese Andrea's (2009) Acoustic Approximation Model. The author used both primary and secondary sources in this study. Under primary sources, the researcher compiled the list of English-Tiv loan words through the participant-observer method, and the secondary sources were obtained from journal articles, textbooks, and dictionaries. From this study, the following findings were made: that English-Tiv loan phonology leads to coda declusterisation. Tiv phonology does not have /θ/, /ð/, /ʒ/, /ʌ/ and /ə/ phonemes; so the said phonemes are being replaced by /t/, /d/, /ʃ/, /ɔ:/ and /æ/. It has been discovered that some loan words maintain their original spellings but have different pronunciations. This study conclude that it is an advancement of scholarship on phonemic substitutions in the English-Tiv loan phonology, making it an important addition to secondary sources of data on the critical reception of English-Tiv loan words and promoting the Tiv language within and beyond the academic cycle.

The study by Aor relates to the current study in that both studies examine Tiv phonology. However, while Aor researched phonemic substitutions in English-Tiv loan phonology, the current study looks at Medical/Covid-19 loan

words in Tiv phonology. Aor's study is limited to substitution, while the current study extends beyond that to fill a void in the study of Medical/Covid-19 loan words in Tiv phonology.

Sokpo, Shittu and Udu (2020) examined *Lexical Borrowing and Language Endangerment: A Case of the Tiv Language*. The study explored the extent to which the Tiv language has incorporated lexical items from Hausa due to prolonged language contact. Utilizing oral interviews with adult native Tiv speakers and reviewing pertinent literature, Sokpo, Shittu and Adu identify that many borrowed terms fill lexical gaps in Tiv, while others replace existing Tiv words. This substitution raises concerns about the gradual erosion of the Tiv lexicon and potential language endangerment. Sokpo, Shittu and Adu underscore the necessity for proactive measures to preserve the Tiv language, such as promoting its use in education and daily communication. The study concludes that the trend of Hausa words gradually replacing Tiv words is worrisome, and calls for intensified studies to ensure that the Tiv language is protected from domination by the Hausa language, to prevent extinction of the language in the future.

Sokpo, Shittu, and Udu examined Hausa-Tiv lexical borrowing and its threat to language endangerment, underscoring

the need for further studies. While their research focused on the impact of Hausa words on the Tiv lexicon, the current study responds to this call by investigating a new and specific area: the phonology of English-Tiv loanwords from the Medical and Covid-19 domains. The current study therefore fills a gap by providing a targeted analysis of a modern and unexamined form of language contact.

Annune, Terna and Annune (2024) examined documentation of the Tiv indigenous medicinal knowledge (IMK) by libraries in Benue state. 3 objectives, 3 research questions and a theory guided the study. A descriptive survey design was adopted for this study. The total population for the study was 3326 which comprised 3028 registered indigenous medicinal practitioners (IMPs) and 298 library staff in three universities in study area. A sample size of 358 was determined from the population using Taro Yamene's 1969 formula for finite population. Purposive sampling and stratified sampling techniques were adopted for the selection of fifty (50) communities and 8 libraries of the study. Snowball sampling technique and convince sampling techniques were used for the selection of 28 chairmen of indigenous medicinal practitioners (IMPs), 14 elderly practitioners and 17 heads of libraries. Questionnaire and Key Informant Interview Schedule (KIIS) were used as

instrument for data collection. Frequency distribution tables, mean and standard deviation were the main statistical tools used in analysing the result. The result revealed that oral narration among family members, use of people's memories, use of physical objects etc are forms of documenting indigenous medicinal knowledge by indigenous practitioners. It was also revealed that visitation, Observation, discussion forum, interview conduction session among others were methods employed by the library staff to document indigenous medicinal knowledge of the Tiv rural communities and that libraries in the study area exhibited "low extent" of information documentation on the Tiv indigenous medicinal knowledge.

The studies of Annune, Terna, and Annune relate to the current study because both studies examine the nature of Tiv language. However, while their study focuses on the preservation of traditional medical knowledge, the current study examines a separate but related issue which is the linguistic integration of modern medical terms. The current study thus fills a gap by analysing how the Tiv language's phonology is impacted by new loanwords from the Medical/Covid-19 domain, a topic not addressed by Annune et al.

Nurul and Estu (2021) examine *The Borrowing Process of English Covid-19-Related Words into Indonesian*. The research was aimed at finding out the patterns of English loans on Covid-19 into Indonesian and their borrowing processes. Data for this qualitative study were English borrowing words and phrases functioning to denote Covid-19 issues which are massively used by Indonesians. The data were obtained from various sources such as mass media, official documents, notices in public places, daily conversation, and others. The classification of borrowing by Haugen (1950) was used in this study. Data analysis was done by comparing the original forms of the loanwords and the phonologically-and morphologically 'imitated' ones. Findings of this study reveal that English loans on Covid19 can be classified into loanwords, loan blends, and loan shift, each of which has its own borrowing processes. None-phonemic substitution, partial-phonemic substitution, and total phonemic substitution are the borrowing process of loanwords. Spelling adjustment and letter omission are the borrowing methods of loan blends. Loan translation is the only borrowing process for loan shift. This study recommends that future research use more data on health realm in order to make a more comprehensive description of the borrowing process in Indonesian.

The study by Nurul and Estu relates to the current research in that both examine the borrowing of COVID-19-related words into a language. However, the two studies differ significantly in scope and location. While Nurul and Estu's work focused on the borrowing of English COVID-19 terms into the Indonesian language, the current study analyzes the borrowing of both general medical and COVID-19 loanwords into Tiv phonology. This shift in focus allows the current research to provide a targeted analysis of a new language and a specific linguistic phenomenon.

Research Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative, descriptive research design to analyse how English medical and COVID-19-related loanwords are adapted into Tiv phonology. The research was conducted in Tiv-

speaking area (Gwer East), utilising a purposive sample of 15 native Tiv speakers. The choice of this area was based on the prevalence of the Tiv language and the increasing influence of English loanwords due to factors such as education, globalisation, and technological advancement. Data was collected through a triangulated method, including semi structured interview, observation with note-taking, and textual analysis of written Tiv materials. The researcher used a wordlist of common loanwords to elicit pronunciations and usage patterns. The data was analysed using qualitative phonological analysis, guided by Phonological Adaptation Theory, to identify and interpret the specific phonological processes that occur as these loanwords are integrated into the Tiv language.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Epenthesis (insertion) in Medical/Covid19 Loan words in Tiv

Original Term	Tiv Loanword	Original Word Transcription	Tiv Pronunciation / Transcription	Phonological Change(s)	Meaning	Etymology
Germ	Jam	/dʒɜ:m/	/dʒam/	Epenthesis: simplification and insertion of /a/	Pathogen	Latin <i>germen</i>
Gentine	Jen Jen	/'dʒɛntam	/dʒɛn dʒɛn	Epenthesis:	Disinfecta	Latin

Violate (G.V.)	Vali	'vaɪələt/	'vali/	/ɛ/ and /i/ inserted	nt	<i>violare</i>
Alcohol	Akohoo	/'ælkəhɒl/	/'akoho/	Epenthesis: /o/ inserted between /k/ and /h/	Ethanol	Arabic <i>al-kuhl</i>
Asprin	Asipirin	/'æsprɪn/	/'asipirin/	Epenthesis: /i/ inserted between /s/ and /p/	Painkiller	German <i>Aspirin</i>
Panadol	Panado	/'pænədɒl/	/'panado/	Epenthesis: /o/ replaces final /ɒl/ to ease pronunciation	Painkiller	Trade name
Syphilis	Sifili	/'sɪfəɪs/	/'sifili/	Epenthesis: insertion and vowel harmony	STD	Modern Latin
Virus	Vairusu	/'vaɪərəs/	/'vairusu/	Epenthesis: /u/ added after /s/	Infectious agent	Latin <i>virus</i>
Transmission	Transimishen	/trænz'mɪʃən/	/tran.si.mi.shen/	insertion of /i/	Spread of disease	Latin

Source: field work, 2025

Table 1 discusses the phonological process of epenthesis in the adaptation of English medical terms into Tiv. Epenthesis, the insertion of extra sounds into a word, is used to make pronunciation conform to Tiv phonotactic rules. For instance, in the adaptation of *aspirin* becomes *asipirin* through the insertion of /i/ between /s/ and /p/, easing the consonantal transition. In *alcohol* → *akohoo*, an /o/ is inserted between /k/ and

/h/ to break up the complex cluster /kh/, while *virus* becomes *vairusu* by adding /u/ at the end for syllable closure. These changes reflect not random alterations, but consistent phonological strategies that ensure borrowed words fit Tiv syllable structure, which often favours open syllables (CV patterns) and avoids complex consonant clusters.

Table 2: Deletion in Medical and Covid19 Loan words in Tiv

Original Term	Tiv Loanword	Original Word Transcription	Tiv Pronunciation / Transcription	Phonological Change(s)	Meaning	Etymological
Antibiotic	Antibaotic	/,æntɪbaɪ'ɒtɪk/	/an.ti.ba.o.tik/	Deletion of /ɪ/	Drug	Greek roots
Cell culture	See koocho	/sel 'kʌl.tʃə(r)/	/se ku.tʃo/	Deletion of consonant cluster /ltʃ/	Biological growth	Latin 'cultura'
Medical	Medika	/'med.ɪ.kəl/	/me.di.ka/	Deletion of final syllable /kəl/	Health-related	Latin 'medicus'
Appendicitis	Apendisi	/ə.pen.dɪ'saɪ.tɪs/	/a.pen.disi/	Deletion of final syllables	Inflammation	Latin 'appendix'
Ulcer	Osa	/'ʌl.sər/	/o.sa/	Deletion of /l/ and /ər/	Sore	Latin 'ulcus'

Source: field work, 2025

Table 2 discusses the phonological process of deletion in the adaptation of English medical terms into Tiv, where certain sounds are removed to simplify pronunciation and align with Tiv phonological patterns. A clear example is *diagnosis* rendered as *dainosis*, where the /əg/ segment is dropped to ease articulation, resulting in /daɪ.no.sis/. Similarly, *antibiotic* becomes *antibaotic* by deleting the unstressed vowel /ɪ/, which streamlines the pronunciation to /an.ti.ba.o.tik/. Likewise, *appendicitis* is

drastically reduced to *apendis*, shedding the final syllables for ease. More complex deletions occur in *cell culture* → *see koocho*, where the difficult consonant cluster /ltʃ/ is simplified to /tʃ/, and *ulcer* becomes *osa* by eliminating both /l/ and the final syllabic /ər/. These deletions reflect a consistent tendency in Tiv to eliminate complex clusters, unstressed vowels, or final syllables that violate its preferred syllable structures, particularly avoiding coda consonants and stress-dependent segments.

Table 3: Substitution in Medical and Covid19 Loan words in Tiv

Original Term	Tiv Loanword	Original Word Transcription	Tiv Pronunciation / Transcription	Phonological Change(s)	Meaning	Etymology
Pharmacy	Famasi	/ˈfɑ:məsi/	/famasi/	Substitution of /ph/ → /f/	Drug store	English
Surgery	Sojiri	/ˈsɜ:dʒəri/	/sojiri/	Substitution of /dʒ/ → /j/	Medical operation	English
Booster	Busta	/ˈbu:stəʃt/	/busta/	Substitution and deletion	Extra dose	English
Immunity	Imuniti	/ɪˈmju:niti/	/imuniti/	/ɪ/ retained, /mju:/ → /mu/	Body resistance	English
Inhaler	Inhela	/ɪnˈheɪlə/	/inhela/	Deletion and /ɪ/ substitution	Breathing device	English
Asthma	Azima	/ˈæsmə/	/azima/	Substitution of /s/ → /z/, /æ/ → /a/	Respiratory illness	English
X-ray	Eksire	/ˈeks reɪ/	/eksire/	Addition and /reɪ/ → /ire/	Diagnostic image	English
Clinic	Klinik	/ˈklɪnɪk/	/klinik/	None	Medical centre	English
COVID	Kovid	/ˈkəʊvɪd/	/kovid/	/c/ → /k/	Virus name	English
Quinine	Kwinin	/ˈkwɪni:n/	/kwinin/	/kw/ retained, vowel simplified	Medicine	English

Source: field work, 2025

Table 3 discusses the phonological process of substitution in the Tiv adaptation of English medical terms, where difficult or unfamiliar sounds in English are replaced with more familiar Tiv equivalents to conform to local

phonological norms. For instance, in *pharmacy* becoming *famasi*, the digraph /ph/ is substituted with the more phonetically accessible /f/, resulting in /famasi/. Similarly, *surgery* is adapted to *sojiri* by replacing the affricate /dʒ/ with

the glide /j/, simplifying articulation. The word *asthma* transforms to *azima*, with /s/ substituted by /z/ and /æ/ replaced with /a/, reflecting typical voiced-voiceless and vowel substitutions. *X-ray* becomes *eksire*, substituting the terminal /reɪ/ with /ire/ for

Discussion of Findings

The objective one identified common medical and COVID-19-related terms borrowed into Tiv language. The study found that the Tiv language has incorporated numerous medical and COVID-19-related terms from English, reflecting direct borrowing to address emerging health concepts. This finding aligns with the study conducted by Adegbija (2021), whose findings reveal that indigenous African languages commonly borrow scientific and medical terms to fill lexical gaps created by globalisation and public health demands.

The objectives two examined phonological processes involved in adapting loanwords to fit Tiv phonotactic rules. The study identifies phonological processes such as syncope, epenthesis, vowel lengthening, and tone adaptation in the adaptation of loanwords to Tiv phonotactics—for example, vowel insertion in *Asipirin* (Aspirin) and loss of medial consonants in *Simtoms* (Symptoms). This finding aligns with Yip

syllabic balance. These examples show how substitution is systematically employed to replace unfamiliar English sounds with Tiv-compatible phonemes, often making the words more pronounceable and culturally integrable.

(2020), whose study reveals that tone assignment in tonal languages is essential to maintain intelligibility in borrowed terms.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the Tiv language actively adapts and integrates foreign medical and COVID-19-related terms through systematic phonological modifications to align with its native phonotactic constraints. This process reflects the dynamic nature of language contact and linguistic borrowing, where loanwords are not merely adopted but transformed to fit the sound patterns and syllable structures familiar to Tiv speakers. The frequent use of phonological processes such as syncope, epenthesis, apocope, and vowel lengthening demonstrates a deliberate linguistic accommodation that ensures ease of pronunciation and comprehension within the Tiv speech community.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations are made.

1. Language planners and educators in Tiv-speaking communities should incorporate the adapted medical and COVID-19-related loanwords into formal language teaching and health communication materials to enhance comprehension and usage.
2. Further research should be conducted on other semantic domains to explore the broader impact of language contact on Tiv phonology, morphology, and vocabulary development.
3. Language planners and Tiv linguists should document, standardise, and disseminate these loanwords to ensure consistency in pronunciation and spelling across educational, media, and healthcare platforms.

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