

## Basic Assumptions of the Theory of Borrowing



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It is a well-known fact that language is a system that undergoes constant changes. The most conspicuous ones are seen on the lexical level. Within our life span all of us are able to notice the establishment of new vocabulary items. They are introduced in three different ways:

1. Invention of neologisms, e.g. in Poland after World War II there was a tendency to eliminate germanisms and substitute them for Polish equivalents, as was the case with German *szlafrok* 'a dressing gown' replaced with the Polish neologism *podomka*.
2. Change of word meanings, e.g. in Polish the word of Latin origin *konwencja* 'convention' was originally used only in the sense of general agreement or a custom or customary practice (*Słownik wyrazów obcych*, 1999), and relatively recently a new meaning taken from American English was added to it: an assembly of the delegates of a political party to select candidates for office (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, 1995; *Słownik wyrazów obcych*, 1999).
3. Addition of borrowings taken over either from foreign languages (external borrowings) or from dialects, jargons, slang of a given language (internal borrowings).

The last way of enlarging vocabulary will be of our concern. Therefore, we should first define the term. It seems that Haugen's (1950: 212) suggestion, although a very old one, is most adequate:

The heart of our definition of borrowing is then the attempted reproduction in one language of patterns previously found in another.

Why do I consider this definition to be most appropriate? This is due to its general character - covering different types of borrowing, not necessarily lexical items but also affixes, structures, the semantics of an item or even phonemes, since the term **patterns** encompasses every linguistic unit. This definition may be contrasted with a more recent one found in *Encyklopedia językoznawstwa ogólnego*, which, however, is more restricted:

*Element* przejęty z obcego języka. Najczęściej jest nim wyraz (np. pol. *afery* z franc. *affaire*), rzadziej prefiks lub sufiks (por. pol. *arcydzielo* z prefiksem *arcy-* pochodzącym z grec. *ἀρχι-*, *pocalunek* z sufiksem *-und* przejętym z niem., por. niem. *-ung*)<sup>1</sup>.

We all agree that the term *borrowing* is controversial because the very word implies the lender's consent and an obligation to return a borrowed item. Certainly, nothing like that happens in the case of the discussed process. It is worth adding that this terminological inadequacy is present in a number of European languages, e.g. French

*emprunt* or Polish *zapóżylenie, pożyczka*. This was, among others, observed by Haugen (1950: 211), who wrote the following:

At first blush the term "borrowing" might seem to be almost as inept for the process we wish to analyse as mixture. The metaphor implied is certainly absurd, since the borrowing takes place without the lender's consent or even awareness, and the borrower is under no obligation to repay the loan. One might as well call it stealing, were it not that the owner is deprived of nothing and feels no urge to recover his goods. The process might be called an adoption, for the speaker does adopt elements from a second language into his own. But what would one call a word that has been adopted – an adoptee?

It is evident that loans result from contact between populations. Language contact is a fraction of cultural contact, which is the reason why Bloomfield (1933: 458) suggests referring to them as to cultural borrowings since they 'show us what one nation has taught another.'

A similar standpoint was earlier taken by Sapir (1921) who went even further and believed that there was a connection between linguistic borrowings and the expansion of culture. To put it more precisely, Sapir claimed that the more loanwords one nation gives to others the more civilised the society should be considered. Certainly, nowadays nobody would agree with such an attitude as it would mean that the Czechs are less civilized than e.g. the English because unlike the English language only one word of Czech origin has enriched many of the European languages. It concerns the word *robot* invented by the Czech writer K. Čapek. Presumably, Cienkowski's (1964) reference of culture to borrowing sounds more plausible at present as the Polish linguist suggested that only on the basis of borrowings (their types, the time of their first occurrence, etc.) can we detect contact between different nations. However, most scholars dealing with borrowings limit their considerations to linguistic aspects and we would proceed along these lines in a similar way.

As is generally known, loans are introduced by bilingual speakers. Who are then bilingual speakers? This expression, as many in linguistics, is controversial. Thus, according to some scholars dealing with the theory of borrowing, the expression *bilingual speaker* or the term *bilingualism* are interpreted in a very general way. Occasionally, it is even claimed that in order to introduce a loan, it is sufficient to know a couple of words to be called a bilingual speaker. It is obvious that other linguists are not in favour of such a broad definition. For instance, Weinreich (1970: 1) understands the term *bilingualism* as an ability to use two languages interchangeably, however, he is aware of different degrees of linguistic competence. On the other hand, Haugen (1969) claims that the word *bilingualism* implies the ability to construct complete and meaningful sentences in the second language. A different interpretation of the term *bilingualism* is to be found in the quoted *Encyklopedia językoznawstwa ogólnego* (1999): *posługiwanie się przez daną grupę społeczną dwoma różnymi językami. Dwujęzyczność wytwarza się na terenach o mieszanym składzie etnicznym. Konieczność współżycia na co dzień zmusza przedstawicieli jednej narodowości do używania oprócz swojego języka ojczystego również języka drugiej grupy etnicznej. Dwujęzyczność występuje np. na niektórych obszarach Szwajcarii (najczęściej niem.-franc.), Belgii (flam.-franc.)... Najczęściej bilingwalni są przedstawiciele grupy*

etnicznej, która z przyczyn społeczno-gospodarczych czy politycznych odgrywa mniejszą rolę w danym kraju, np. Łużycanie w Niemczech...<sup>2</sup>

Thus, loans are first used only by bilinguals and then gradually spread around. Therefore, we can speak of a dynamic process (the level of Saussure's *parole* or Chomsky's *performance*) which ends in the introduction of the loanword to the language system, or to use again de Saussure's terminology, it becomes part of *langue* or, as referred to by Chomsky's more modern term, part of our *competence*. This implies that the loan becomes a stable element in the language.

The briefly discussed description of the process of borrowing is the 20th century approach, as in the 19th century it was believed that there was no question of introducing loans but of mixing languages (e.g. Whitney, Schuchardt). At the present state of our linguistic knowledge we all agree that there are no mixed tongues, apart from Creole or Pidgin languages. We also know that the process of borrowing is inevitable as there are no pure natural languages. To quote Jakobson's famous saying, 'no language as no economics is self-sufficient' (Buttler *et al.*, 1973).

However, it is worth explaining that there is no correlation between the number of borrowings and efficiency to communicate in a particular language. Still, we have to find a certain balance between the introduction of loans and their possible overuse. It is generally accepted that if we take over a good number of loanwords, we make our language richer and more modern although, at the same time, we impoverish it by eliminating native items. It is evident that we should not overuse borrowings, especially when there are native equivalents (Deroy, 1956). In the case of overusing borrowings, we speak of luxurious loanwords. Let us only add that they are usually taken over because of fashion or snobbery; however, as we know from the history of languages, in the course of time they are often eliminated; cf. the 17th and 18th century impact of galicisms on Polish, which later disappeared. Luxury loans are usually contrasted with necessary loans that cover exotics or foreignisms, names of designates and concepts unknown in the borrowing language as well as internationalisms. It is clear that the introduction of loanwords results in the reorganisation of relations and distinctive oppositions in the language system.

To come back to the process of borrowing, it is worth stressing that, as has already been stated, new loans are introduced by bilinguals<sup>3</sup> who first try to imitate 'models' as closely as possible. That is the reason why we are confronted with so-called citations at first, and only later does the process of assimilation start on four linguistic levels of analysis - phonetic, graphic, morphological and semantic. It is obvious that the adaptation does not always take place on all the levels. Therefore, following Haugen (1950), we distinguish loans that are either imported or substituted on different planes of linguistic description. To give an example, the lexical item *dżinsy*, derived from the English *jeans*, in Polish exhibits substitution on the phonetic, graphic and morphological levels and importation on the semantic plane. On the contrary, the loan *skwer* from the English *square* is an illustration of substitution on the phonetic, graphic and semantic planes and importation on the morphological level.

It has to be mentioned that some loanwords never undergo any assimilation in the borrowing language and they remain as quotations (often referred to by the German term *Fremdwörter*); however, most loans become adapted and, sticking to the German

terminology, we would call them *Lehnwörter*. Some of these are so well-assimilated that they are not felt as loanwords, particularly by those speakers who do not know the language of origin of a borrowing, which may be illustrated by the 'Polish' word *rum* < E *rum* already attested at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries in Polish. It goes without saying that the loans which are well assimilated often undergo derivational processes typical of the borrowing language. This is, for instance, the case with the cited noun *rum*, which due to the addition of the Polish suffix *-owy* becomes an adjective (*rumowy*). It is evident that there are loans to which more than one suffix or prefix are attached. This constitutes a frequent phenomenon in the case of the impact of English on Polish, e.g. P *koks* < E *coke* takes as many as ten different derivational suffixes: *koksiak, koksiaz, koksik, koksowanie, koksownia, koksownik, koksownictwo, koksujący, koksowy, koksowniczy*.

The next issue is connected with the classification of loans. The most common and at the same time the most general one is characterised by the following distinctions:

1. loanwords, e.g. Polish *budzet* < English *budget*;
2. loanblends (or hybrids), e.g. Polish *drewland* being a combination of the Polish morpheme *drew-* and English word *land*;
3. loanshifts (or calques), e.g. Polish *nastolatek* structured after English *teenager* (Hockett, 1958).

Certainly, very many different divisions have been suggested by other scholars, as is the case with Haugen (1950) who still distinguishes semantic loans; cf. the quoted example of the word *konwencja* as an illustration of this type of borrowings.

Another classification of loans is not based on their form but on the way they are introduced. Thus, we can differentiate between oral loans, i.e. those that are imported via spoken language, e.g. the English word *fair*, which is pronounced in a similar fashion in Polish, or graphic loans which enter the borrowing language by written medium as is the case with the lexical item *nylon* characterised by spelling pronunciation. Both types of loanwords are introduced either directly from the donor language or via a mediating language. The latter means of importing loanwords is connected with the very definition of the term *borrowing* since, if we accept the idea of indirect loans, we simultaneously reject the understanding of the loanword suggested by some scholars who claim that the last source of contact indicates the origin of a word. To illustrate, let us quote Kuroczycki and Rzepka's (1979) example of the lexical item *chuligan* which did not enter Polish directly from English (*hooligan*) but via Russian, and therefore the mentioned linguists consider the loan a russionism. Another classification of borrowings concerns the mentioned distinction between necessary and luxury loanwords.

The final question that should be addressed concerns the reasons for borrowing. According to Weinreich (1970), there are both linguistic and extra-linguistic causes. Among the linguistic reasons that Weinreich mentions we have:

- low frequency of native equivalents;
- existence of homonyms in the borrowing language;
- no emotive aspects associated with native equivalents;
- no differentiation of native words in the same semantic field;
- wrong or even bad connotations of native words.



On the other hand, extra-linguistic reasons involve the need-filling motive, i.e. the necessity to name new designates or ideas, as well as the prestige motive, which is manifested by the tendency to borrow lexical items from a more prestigious language.

I do realise that this is a very brief overview of the theory of borrowing, however, it seems to me that its most basic assumptions have been discussed in the present article.

#### Notes:

1. An element taken over from another language. Most often it is a word (e.g. Polish *afera* from French *affaire*), less frequently a prefix or suffix (cf. Polish *arcydzielo* with the prefix *arcy-* derived from Greek *ἀρχι-*, *pocalunek* with the suffix *-unek* taken over from German, see German *-ung*) [translated by EM-W].
2. The usage of two different languages by a social group. Bilingualism is found on the terrains of mixed ethnicity. The necessity of everyday co-existence forces the representatives of one nationality to use not only their native language but also the language of the other ethnic group. Bilingualism is observed e.g. in some parts of Switzerland (most frequently, German and French), Belgium (Flemish and French)... Most often the representatives of the ethnic group who due to social, economic or political reasons play a less important role in a given country become bilinguals, e.g. the Sorbians in Germany... [translated by EM-W].
3. Scientists, journalists, musicians, sportsmen, economists, and nowadays more and more often, tourists constitute the group of bilinguals responsible for the introduction of borrowings.

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### Փոխառության տեսության հիմնահարցեր

Հոդվածում ուսումնասիրության նյութ են դարձել բառապաշարի ընդլայնման երեք ուղիները՝ նորաբանությունների ստեղծում, բառիմաստի փոփոխություն, փոխառությունների ներմուծում: Փոխառյալ բառերը, նախ և առաջ, ներմուծվում են երկլեզվակիրների միջոցով, ապա հետագայում տարածում ստանում տվյալ լեզվում: Հետևաբար, եզրակացնում է հեղինակը, փոխառությունը դիմամիկ գործընթաց է, քանի որ բառը, կիրառվելով խոսքում, դառնում է լեզվական համակարգի բաղկացուցիչ մաս:

Հոդվածում դիտարկվում են նաև փոխառություններին և դրանց արդյունավետությանը վերաբերող մի շարք հարցեր, ինչպես նաև փոխառյալ լեզվում փոխառությունների յուրացման գործընթացը: