LINGUISTIC BORROWING:
THE METAPHORICAL INCORPORATION OF EXPERIENCE
FROM ONE CULTURE INTO ANOTHER

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Abstract: Linguistic borrowing is a widespread phenomenon in the present age, when English lexis is being increasingly incorporated into the world's languages. Such borrowing is described as a form of metaphorical incorporation of experience from one culture into another. Like other forms of metaphor, in borrowing the linkage of words and concepts across two linguistic domains creates new meanings and communicative modalities that expand expressive resources.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the major linguistic trends in the present era is the incorporation of English lexis into the world's languages. In many cases around the world, including the largescale borrowing and code-mixing[1] from English into African and Asian languages as well as the cases in Europe of so-called "Franglais" (Étiemble, 1964; Kahane and Kahane, 1992; Kibbee, 1993) and "Youth German" (Salmons 1991), cultural borrowing on a grand scale has promoted a degree of *lexical bilingualism* with English. The result is an incorporation of English words into otherwise non-English discourse. As a different medium of communication with different values and linguistic characteristics, the symbolic resource of the English lexicon offers those with some degree of bilingualism fresh linguistic material and new images for

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[1] Although it is not the same as borrowing, code-mixing is part of the process of linguistic and cultural interaction through which loanwords enter a language. However, many code-mixed items never attain a sufficient currency to become loanwords.

creating alternative discourses and for expressing unique syntheses of cultures and experiences.

2. ILLUSTRATING THE PHENOMENON

In many of the world's speech communities, the English language serves as a source of new representations of reality and forms of symbolisation. In addition to simple borrowing, for example, of technical terms and terms for new products, speakers of other languages have made use of English in the creation of new words and expressions, sometimes by combining English and native language lexis or morphology, sometimes by developing new meaningful combinations based entirely on English lexis. In many cases, the English lexicon functions not merely to augment or supplement the native language lexicon but more essentially as an additional symbolic resource.

The examples in Table 1 show some of the more creative effects of this language mixing and borrowing process, involving linguistic blends and semantic shifts of various kinds, in Asia (e.g., in Hong Kong Cantonese, Japanese, Korean) and in Africa (e.g., in Swahili). These examples of creative loanblends, semantic extensions, and neologisms in individual lexical items or combinations give some idea of the nature, the extent, and the creative exploitation of English lexical imports in the languages of the world.

Table 1 Examples of Creative Lexical Borrowing

Cantonese   *fuhlūk* ('person who got through with minimum of work'; fr. fluke")

fātsí ('frivolous'; source "fussy")   *short short* ('crazy')

chè lóu ('chairperson'; fr. E. "chair" + C. "guy")

làai gei ('library'; fr. E. "li[brary]" + C. "business")

ngáauh jih gag ('biting [Chinese] character gag': punning on Chinese characters; fr. C. "biting [Chinese] character" + E. "gag")

Japanese   *nowy* ('modern', 'stylish')

hai sensu ('good taste in fashion'; fr. E. "high" + E. "sense")

beisu appu ('salary rise'; fr. E. "[wage] base" + E. "up")

pink calaa jobbu ('pink collar job')

mai homu shugi ('my homism': a centring of one's life on home and family (rather than work); fr. E. "my home" + J. "philosophy")

Korean   *olfù misù* ('old miss': single women around thirty)

maikha sitae ('my car period': an era when everybody has one's own car; fr. E. "my car" + K. "cra")

nochönyö histeli ('temper tantrums of single women around thirty; fr. K. "old maid" + E. "hysteria")

Swahili   *fit* ('good')   *life* ('a very luxurious kind of life'; source "life")

praudipraudi ('showing off')

kuspend ('enjoyment'; fr. K. "to" + E. "spend")

mambo fresh ('I'm alright'; fr. S. 'things' + E. 'fresh')

SOURCES - Cantonese: Gibbons (1987), Li (in press); Japanese: Hayashi and Hayashi (1994); Kay (1995), McCreary (1990); Korean: Shim (1994); Swahili: Blommaert, 1992; Kishe (1994); Myers-Scotton (1993b).

Even in France, where there has been a great attempt to keep English out of the mother tongue, foreign expressions are continually introduced and re-introduced through the media and school study. In a sense the English are now doing to the French language what the French did to the English language after the Norman Conquest, when a huge number of French words were borrowed into English. Cases of such linguistic "turnabout", as part of the complex pattern of cumulative mutual influence of geographical neighbours, are probably far more common than is generally recognised.

In this country now just a tunnel away from the British homeland, an estimated 75% of recent loanwords derive from English (Flaitz, 1993). These include such fields as **economy**

(*marketing, shopping center*), **mass media** (*cover-girl, mass media*), **technology** (*automation, laser*), **social life** (*play-boy, babysitter*), **fashion** (*blue-jean, tee-shirt*), and **sport** (*sportsman, foot-ball*) (Kahane and Kahane, 1992). In addition to the large number of loanwords, there are creative coinages and loanblends from English such as the brand name *DEMAK'UP* for a line of makeup and skin care products (Bhatia, 1992). Even for linguistic purists, the allure of the foreign tongue is irresistible: English sells.

3. INTERPRETING THE PHENOMENON

Terms for new things -- products and technologies -- bring with them the connotations and historical experience of the lending language and its culture. This experience, this history, is incorporated through its grammaticalisation -- more precisely, its lexicalisation -- in language. As Halliday (1993) has noted, the representation of experience in language is a sort of metaphor for the experience itself, as, for example, movement, processes, and activities are represented as verbs, objects and abstractions as nouns. Thus, not only things but their representation in linguistic form are brought into a new cultural context by borrowing. In this way, societies and their modes of communication experience rapid modernisation and profound change.

All uses of lexis from one language in another are metaphorical in that their use implies a different map of reality than use of native lexis. It could be said that in communicating on a metaphorical level, a speaker (and any listener who understands the speaker's meaning as intended) builds a conceptual bridge between two otherwise distinct sets of propositions or conceptual structures. In this way, people communicating metaphorically are constructing hybrid conceptual structures that make the linguistic form, the metaphor, interpretable.

In my view, this is exactly what happens when one inserts a lexical item or phrase from one language into another. That is, one constructs or presumes a conceptual bridge between the base or matrix language frame (Myers-Scotton, 1993a) and the foreign lexis brought into that frame. In cases of largescale borrowing, communication moves increasingly to this metaphorical abstract or figurative, non-literal level -- at least for a time till active borrowing of lexis diminishes due to a change in the historical circumstances which activated the massive borrowing in the first place.

Words borrowed from a second language enter the borrowing language abstracted, literally, from their original context, and abstracted also, to a greater or lesser degree, from their original meaning. Even a technical term when used in a new language context is unlikely to have precisely the same meaning in the borrowing language, taking the meaning as the whole history of the word and all its connotations in relation to other words in the same semantic sphere or field, though highly specialised lexis is perhaps more resistant to semantic change than less specialised lexis. In more typical cases -- such as *democracy* in China, *home* in Japan, or *miss* in Korea -- new connotations attach to loanwords as part of the process of cultural interaction that produces borrowing. In the usual case these will be new hybrid meanings that draw on both the original and the borrowing languages' cultural connotations and meanings, as in the examples given.

When an English word is transported into another language, some or all of the original, English-based interpretive frame (Goffman, 1974, 1981) in which that word would occur is borrowed as well. Hayashi and Hayashi (1995) give several examples of such "frame borrowing", as described by Fillmore (1982):

> When a speaker wishes to talk about something for which an appropriate cognitive frame has not been established, or for which he wishes to introduce a novel schematization, he can sometimes accomplish this by transferring the linguistic material associated with a frame which makes the distinctions he's interested in onto the new situation, relying on the interpreter to see the appropriateness of the transfer. (p. 125)

This is in fact what is meant by metaphor.

In a metaphor such as *My husband is a rock,* one thing -- termed a "primary subject" or "tenor" (here, *my husband*) -- is expressed and comprehended in terms of the attributes of something else -- a "secondary subject" or "vehicle" (in this case, *a rock*). Thus, as Black (1962, 1979) observed, metaphor involves the interaction of knowledge from one domain, the primary domain or system of meaning, with that of another domain, the secondary domain or system of meaning. The attributes which are metaphorically applied to a subject from the primary system, i.e., the primary subject or tenor, are drawn from the secondary system via a comparison with the secondary subject or vehicle. In the words of Way (1991):

> Metaphor...involves the *interaction* of these two domains, where the associated ideas and implications of the secondary domain or system are *transferred* to the primary system. The primary subject is then seen through the 'filter' of the properties of the secondary system. (p. 47)

Metaphor is not a simple comparison of properties between a primary and a secondary subject; rather, it involves an *abstraction* of some common properties between the two via (the retrieval or creation of) a semantic *supertype* (Way, 1991, p. 129). This "higher-level supertype found or dynamically created to be common to both terms.... when externally imposed on the tenor, yields new knowledge and insight" (Way, 1991, p. 132).

As a result of creative borrowing, English lexis such as *fluke, fit,* or *home* is incorporated into other languages via a semantic (and syntactic and phonological) supertype that includes whatever words, images, etc., in the borrowing language are mutually implicated by the selected attributes of the English words. These may or may not be the obvious ones that would implicate their translation equivalents in the importing language. More generally, through the cumulative effects of all these importations -- what DuBois (1983) in another context has termed "this *cumulative* skewed pressure" (p. 360) -- the system of English-based meanings can be seen to have become metaphorically incorporated into each borrowing language as a supertype language variety, or via a number of registers of mixed language.

When lexical incorporation from one language into another is massive, the tendency to use language on a figurative, metaphorical level increases, and discourse functions as a communicative vehicle for playing with language and for creating new meaning. In this figurative arena, metaphorical associations are made and new expressions coined that both

realise and help to develop distinctive genres for ever-evolving media contexts (e.g., those of advertising and entertainment in magazines and on television) as well as new identities in the younger generation and in specialised groups (e.g., university students or professionals in a certain field) wanting to claim a distinct status as against other groups. In this way, an additive form of lexical incorporation that began as a simple augmentation of the lexicon evolves to a process of lexical innovation. Through this process of lexical innovation, speakers in one speech community produce creative new hybrid forms of expression which would not be understood by speakers of the lending language, nor by speakers of the borrowing language in other communities. Thus, for example, Cantonese speakers in Guangzhou (Canton) cannot understand discourse in Hong Kong that incorporates semantically specialised English lexis and unique lexical blends of Cantonese and English such as are commonly found in talk at universities (Gibbons, 1987) and in the Chinese press (Li, in press).

4. CONCLUSION

To summarise the argument, in the present period of massive active incorporation of English lexis into the world's languages, and in the discourse contexts such as technical and academic discussions and treatises, advertising and media features, and student talk where such incorporation is particularly common, the conceptual structure and experience of another culture is injected, at a metaphorical level, through language. This additional lexis and its second language base is then further manipulated and developed at a metaphorical level, through new hybrid expressions of various sorts.

Far from spelling the downfall of these languages and cultures, what we are witnessing is a process of dynamic evolution that ensures survival under new conditions. In fact, this appears to be just what happened in the medieval period when English massively appropriated French lexis to its own purposes, in a period of lexical "trickle-down" (Kahane and Kahane, 1979) of vocabulary from the prestige language, which was French, into the "humble" indigenous language, which English was at that time.

Although it can be argued that some cultural distinctiveness is lost by these borrowing and hybridisation processes, any tendency to consolidate languages or world views appears to be offset by a tendency to creatively manipulate the resources of a second culture to construct new language varieties and world views at an ever higher power of abstraction, fuelling the blending process of innovation that is characteristic of the "meta-stable" system (Halliday, 1993) or "dynamic open system" (Halliday and Martin, 1993; Lemke, 1984) that is language, a system "which can only persist by constantly changing in interaction with its environment" (Halliday, 1993, pp. 30-31).

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