

Borrowing Language Stocks: The case of English Language

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Abstract: Since the 5th century English has borrowed words from different languages of the world. There is hardly a language with which speakers of English have come in contact that has not served as the source of borrowing. Trade and conquest have been important factors in the introduction of new words and ideas. Some words have entered English, not by direct contact with the language, but indirectly through an intervening language. Although English has borrowed a large number of words from different languages of the world, the most essential English words are native English. Most old English words were Germanic. The Middle English period mostly came from Latin. Others came from French. Many Greek words came into English through Latin. Modern English has continued to borrow mainly from Arabic and other languages of the world. At present, however, borrowing is taking place with its own dialects (American and British English). Studying the sources of borrowed words could be an exciting endeavor and intellectual exercise in addition to providing a basis for comparing languages that may make individuals more sensitive and aware of the forms and structures of their own languages.

Introduction

Borrowing is one way of adding new vocabulary items to a language. Speakers of a language often have contact with speakers of other languages. If a speaker of one of these languages does not have a readily available word for something in the world and a speaker of the other language does, the first speaker often borrows the word from the

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second speaker. To this end, Falk (1973:50) wrote: borrowing is the addition to the lexicon of a word from another language.

Languages do not borrow words from one another in a haphazard fashion, but rather under particular conditions. Regarding this, Falk (1973:50) states that it is important: to trace the history of a people where they settled, whom they conquered, who conquered them, their patterns of commerce, their religious and intellectual history, and the development of their society.

Borrowing is a consequence of cultural contact between two language communities. Borrowing of words can go in both directions between the two languages in contact, but often there is an asymmetry, such that more words go from one side to the other. In this case the source language community has some advantage of power, prestige and/or wealth that makes the objects and ideas it brings desirable and useful to the borrowing language community. For example, the Germanic tribes in the first few centuries adopted numerous loanwords from Latin as they adopted new products via trade with the Romans. Few Germanic words, on the other hand, passed into Latin.

The actual process of borrowing is complex and involves many usage events (i.e. instances of use of the new word). Generally, some speakers of the borrowing language know the source language too, or at least enough of it to utilize the relevant word. They (often consciously) adopt the new word when speaking the borrowing language, because it most exactly fits the idea they are trying to express. If they are bilingual in the source language, which is often the case, they might pronounce the words the same or similar to the way they are pronounced in the source language. For example, English speakers adopted the word garage from French, at first with a

pronunciation nearer to the French pronunciation than is now usually found. Presumably the very first speakers who used the word in English knew at least some French and heard the word used by French speakers, in a French-speaking context. Many linguists believe that it is natural for one speech community to borrow from other speech community names of objects, places and other words necessary for interaction. As Bloomfield (1935:445) put it, every speech community learns from its neighbors. Objects, both natural and manufactured, pass from one community to the other, and so do patterns of action, such as technical procedures, warlike practices, religious rites, or fashions of individual conduct.

Intercommunication is a necessary condition, if not always sufficient, for lexical borrowing. Bilingualism is the most complete form of intercommunication. Hermann Paul pointed out that all borrowing by one language from another is predicated on some minimum bilingual mastery of the two languages (Hungerford, 1970:429). Hence it was quite natural that many French words were borrowed into English during the period of the Norman Conquest in 1066.

Besides French, Latin and Greek were other major sources of borrowing in English. To this effect Hall (1964:322) wrote: a very large part of the vocabulary of English over 50% is of Latin or Greek origin either borrowed directly from those languages by scholars (learned words) or through the intermediary of French mostly in Middle English time, in the 14th and 15th centuries.

The main aim of this paper is, therefore, to show the particular conditions that necessitated borrowing in English, major sources of its borrowed words and to see the implications, if any.

Historical Background

The history of English dates back to the 5th century (Crystal, 1997: 25). This period is commonly known as Old English period (450 to 1150). The next period was known as Middle English period (1150 to 1500). It was during this period that French words began to be introduced in increasing numbers. Albert Baugh has estimated that during the four hundred years or so of the Middle English period, something like ten thousand French words were adopted into English (Francis, 1967: 139). The language since 1500 is called Modern English. Robertson (1954: 153) stated that in Modern English borrowings were much more likely to be from Latin than from French. Greenough and Kittredge estimated that English "has appropriated a full quarter of the Latin vocabulary, besides what it has gained by transferring Latin meanings to native words. Both the number and the nature of the words borrowed are different in each of these periods" (Ibid). To this end, Mary Serjeantson said that a large majority of the earliest loans were nouns - the names of concrete objects. Adjectives and verbs were rare, and most of the latter were derivatives from nouns (1968:14).

For English speakers, trade has always been an important factor in the introduction of new words and of new ideas. Even before English had separated from its Germanic stock it was trade almost as much as conquest which brought into it its first words from other languages.

Some words have entered English, not by direct contact with the language which is their source, but indirectly, through an intervening language. In this way many of the earlier Italian loans came to English through French, the Italian Renaissance having reached France first, and thence having passed on to Britain. In this way, too, the earliest

loanwords from the east have come to English through Latin, many of them having already passed through Greek before reaching Latin. Even in the early centuries of this era, before communication became as simple and rapid as it is today, words traveled thousands of miles, westwards from Asia to Europe, across Europe from east to west and from south to north, all round the shores of the Mediterranean, from nation to nation and from generation to generation. Most of these much-traveled words are objects of trade or culture. The word pepper, for instance, came first from some eastern language into Greek, thence into Latin and thence into English; elephant was first Egyptian, then

Greek, Latin, French and finally English; camel was originally Semitic, and this too passed through Greek and Latin before reaching English. Silk has been Chinese, Greek, Latin and finally English. Carat has come through Greek, Arabic, Italian and French (Serjeantson, 1968:6).

English has borrowed words from languages all over the world including Chinese, Japanese, Russian, Spanish and all the languages of several American-Indian groups through three languages (Latin, Greek and French) have contributed such extensive shares to the English word-stock as to deserve particular attention. But practically it is often difficult or impossible to determine the immediate source of borrowing, because, as Robertson (1954:149) put it, Greek words are likely to be Latinized in form before they are made English, and Latin words are likely to be Gallicized.

In general, as stated by Falk (1973:55), there is scarcely a language with which speakers of English have come in contact that has not served as the source of at least a few words.

The Greek Element

Greek was one of the major sources of English vocabulary. Of direct borrowings from Greek into Old and Middle English, however, were virtually none. Three of the very few old loanwords from Greek are church, devil and angel, but it is almost certain that each was borrowed through Latin, even church, a pre-Christian borrowing, ultimately a Greek-word meaning 'Lord's house', and one that English retained in preference to any derivative of the Latin ecclesia. Among the Latin words introduced by the Roman missionaries into Old English are ecclesiastical terms that had been originally borrowed from Greek: abbot, alms, clerk, monk, pope, priest and synod. Later medieval borrowings through the medium of Latin and usually French as well are such words as diet, geography, logic, physics, rhetoric, surgeon and theology (Robertson, 1954: 150).

Greek words borrowed by Modern English include, drama, comedy, tragedy, melodrama, catastrophe, climax, dialog, epilog, scene, botany, physiology, zoology, atomic, proton, gamma-rays, isotope, etc. (Ibid: 150).

Greek words that have been incorporated into the English vocabulary have not always implied direct borrowing from Greek. Words like barometer and thermometer are adopted in English through French (Ibid.). \

The Latin Element

When the people who were to become English invaded the island of Great Britain, they took over what had been for several centuries a province of the Roman Empire. In Britain, Latin had not completely

superseded the Celtic of the conquered, but it had become the language of the ruling class. Latin words had been borrowed into British and many names were Latin or Latinized Celtic in form.

While borrowings, and particularly direct borrowings, from the Greek have been largely confined to Modern English, English has been exposed to Latin influence throughout its history.

It was the revival of classical learning in the 16th century that first swelled the number of English words borrowed from Latin to overwhelming proportions. The number of Middle English loans from Latin is difficult to estimate because so many were made over to look as if they had come by way of French. There can be no doubt that the great mass of borrowings in early Modern English came directly from Latin. Romanic borrowings in Middle English are on the whole much more likely to be from French than Latin; in Modern English they are much more likely to be from Latin than from French.

Most of the formal vocabulary of religion/and the church consisted of the newly borrowed Latin or Latinized Greek words. Sometimes, however, native words were used with a new meaning. Some words of this sort are still very much alive: among them are Easter, lent, heaven, hell, God, Holy Ghost, and sin (Francis, 1967:136).

Latin continued to be the language not only of the church but of all scholarship and learning throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance and well into the Modern English period. For about a thousand years, educated men kept using Latin words in their written English and to a lesser extent in speech. After the Norman Conquest, this tendency was strengthened by the extensive borrowings from French. Old French, the direct descendant of the spoken Latin of

the latter Empire, preserved many Latin words with little change either in pronunciation or in spelling. Educated Frenchmen, thoroughly familiar with Latin, were in the habit of adopting - or reviving - Latin words in their writing. For this reason, it is often hard to tell whether a particular English word of Latin derivation was taken directly from Latin or came via French.

Because of the influence of French, certain conventions arose concerning the form which Latin loan- words took in English. In general, the forms of French nouns which survived were those developed from the oblique case forms of Latin, but with loss of the inflectional endings. As a result, certain endings such as -ity, -tion, -cion, and -ment passed through French to become English morphemes which could be applied to native or borrowed stems to produce new words like jollity, starvation and acknowledgement. Similarly, Latin adjective endings like -osus and -abilis gave rise both directly and through French to adjective-forming suffixes like -ose (verbose), -ous (famous), and -able (lovable). A verb-forming suffix -ate derived from the Latin past participle ending -atus, but now appears as part of many words that would not have had this suffix in Latin, though they may be made up of Latin elements - substantiate, vaccinate, assassinate, etc. (Francis, 1967: 137).

By the middle of the 17th century, the proportion of Latin borrowings and Latin-based words in the English vocabulary had attained about the level it has today. Nevertheless, a diminished stream of Latinate words has continued to come into English over time. Some of these are legal words ((alibi, deficit), some scientific (nebula, nucleus, circus), some political (propaganda, ultimatum), some mechanical

(pendulum, fulcrum), and some medial (lumbago, isomnia) (Francis, 1967: 138-139).

The following are some of the Latin words in Modern English taken unchanged: affidavit, agenda, alibi, animal, bonus, deficit, exit, extra, fiat, item, maximum, memorandum, omnibus, propaganda, quorum, veto, via, etc. (Robertson, 1954:153).

In present day technical and scientific English, Latin shares with Greek as the source of a host of new coinages, or of new applications of words already adopted. A very few examples will suggest the range and variety of these words: coaxial, fission, neutron, penicillin, spectrum, etc., and there are also a considerable number of hybrid forms, partly Greek, partly Latin such as egomaniac, speleology, teramycin, etc. (Robertson, 1954:155).

The French Element

Towards the close of the Old English period, an event occurred which had a greater effect on the English language than any other in the course of its history. This was the Norman Conquest in 1066. To this end, Baugh wrote, the Norman Conquest changed the whole course of the English language (1935:131).

It was during the later Middle English period, especially the 14th century, that the great flood of French words entered the English language. Many of the borrowed words entered by way of literature, since French romances and other literary works had wide circulation among educated Englishmen.

All sorts of words were borrowed during this period. Some continued to reflect the upper-class milieu in which French continued to be spoken:

such are the extensive vocabularies of cookery, of dress, of polite accomplishments like music, hunting, dancing, and courtly love. But French contributed a great deal of the working vocabulary of businessmen and merchants, lawyers, doctors, architects and builders - words like contract, import, debt; felony, criminal, judges, ointment, medicine, surgeon; chamber, lodge, chapel, buttress, portal and vault indicate how much of the vocabulary of these various professions came

in at this time (Francis, 1967: 142). Many words of wide general use, especially verbs and adjectives came in to supplement or replace Old English words. Examples:

Verbs: allow, arrange, change, declare, endure, furnish, increase, move, pass, quit, reply, save; travel, wait;

Adjectives: active, brief, calm, double, easy, faint, gentle, honest, large, natural, poor, safe, usual (1967: 142)

The words borrowed from French since 1500 are of great variety, reflecting the diversity of French culture and the complexity of the relationships between England and France. Mary Serjeantson (as quoted by Francis, 1967) gives extensive lists:

Military and naval: colonel, dragoon, reveille, corps, sortie, barrage
People: viceroy, bourgeois, coquette, chaperon, chauffeur

Buildings and furniture: scene, parterre, attic, salon, hangar

Literature, art, and music: rondeau, hautboy, connoisseur, brochure, Renaissance, matinee

Dress, fashion and materials: cravat, denim, chenille, perfume, blouse, cretonne, suede, rouge

Food and cooking: table d'hôtel, soup, veal, beef, pork, restaurant, chef, mouse (Francis, 1967: 144)

Moreover, a large number of the borrowed items were words for upper class concerns and interests, related to feudal society (castle, court, prince), law (crime, jury, prison), government (country, state, nation) and religion (angel, religion, saint) (Wardhaugh, 1977:153).

The Arabic Element

Many words used in astrology and alchemy have their roots in Arabic because the Arabic world was at the forefront of these disciplines. It would probably surprise you to find out just how many English words have their origins in Arabic.

People who speak English do not realize that some of the time they are also speaking Arabic. There are perhaps as many as 10,000 words derived from Arabic. Words like alcohol, algebra, algorithm, almanac, banana, caliber, guitar, lemon, mattress, pie, and tulip are just a few.

A lot of this influence on languages took place between the 8th and 12th centuries as the Islamic Empire expanded into the Mediterranean. Even today words like kebab, couscous, falafel, and hummus are finding their way into English dictionaries.

For 1000 years, Arabic was the primary international language of commerce, scholarship and politics, much as English is in today's world. In fact, over the centuries English adopted many words that

were either borrowed directly from Arabic, or were indirectly through other languages, especially Spanish.

African Languages

African languages have offered words like gorilla, guinea, voodoo, zebra, hoodoo, jazz. Coffee, which Francis Bacon described in 1624 as *caffa*, a drink black as soot and of a strong scent, comes through Arabic from the name of the Ethiopian province of Kaffa (Pei, 1967: 109).

Conclusion

The great waves of borrowing that took place under the long periods of contact with Latin and French have not recurred in Modern English. In the recent history of English-speaking peoples, no conqueror has come to impose his language on the people as did the Normans, nor has any language, other than perhaps English itself, become the language of scholarship and international communication in the western world.

Though English has borrowed a large number of words from different languages of the world, the commonest and most essential English words are native English. Most Old English words were Germanic. During the Middle English period, English borrowed thousands of words from other languages. Most of these words were Latin in origin. Many of them came into English from Latin. Others came from French. Most of these French words had, in turn, come from Latin. Many words of Greek origin also came into English through Latin.

During the Modern English Period, English has continued to borrow from other languages of the world. At present, however, borrowing in English is taking place within its own dialects (especially American and British English). The Americans have borrowed words like penny, smog, intake, swank, dressing gown, dinner jacket, etc. from British English. Similarly the British have borrowed words such as billion, briefcase, cafeteria, radio, telephone, O.K., etc. from American English (Pyles, 1952).

It is part of the cultural history of English that they have always adopted loanwords from the languages of whatever cultures they have come in contact with. There have been few periods when borrowing became unfashionable, and there has never been a national academy in Britain, the U.S., or other English-speaking countries to attempt to restrict new loanwords, as there has been in many continental European countries. As a result, English has a larger and more varied vocabulary than any other language. At present there are over 600,000 words in English, excluding technical words.

Implications

Some people hold the opinion that it is possible to "improve your English" by studying Latin or some other factors that contributed to the development of the Modern English. But Latin and English are different languages. Borrowed words, like native words, sometimes change in meaning during the course of time. Furthermore, English has its own rules of word formation. As Falk stated, "Any knowledge a person may have of morphemes and rules of word formation in Latin will be of relatively little help in creating words in English" (1973:56).

The study of any language, or an earlier stage of language, can provide a basis of comparing languages that may make individuals more sensitive to, and aware of, the forms and structure of their own language. But the ability in Latin or other sources of borrowed words won't help one to communicate more effectively in Modern English. In support of this view Falk wrote: "Tracing the development of words can be an exciting endeavor, a kind of intellectual treasure hunt. But those who enter upon such study solely in order to "improve their English" in some way are doomed to immediate frustration and ultimate failure" (Falk, 1973:56).

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