

## SEMANTIC CHANGE OF BORROWED LEXICAL UNITS

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În lucrarea dată, se analizează evoluția semantică a unităților lexicale împrumutate din alte limbi. Modificarea semantică a lexemelor nemotivate este considerabilă și necesită a fi luată în considerație în procesul de predare/învățare a unei limbi străine. Toate cuvintele sunt expuse unui proces continuu de schimbare a structurii semantice în dependență de nivelul și tempoul de dezvoltare a comunității lingvistice vizate.

In a previous article we analyzed a number of aspects, as to the semantic change of lexical units in the English language, with occasional examples taken from other languages in order to prove the fact that the general linguistic phenomenon of semantic change is common not only to the English language. In the present article we are going to concentrate our attention on the linguistic process of borrowing, taking into consideration the diachronic and synchronic methods. The English basic vocabulary consists of about 70% of the word-stock borrowed from other languages or created by means of word-building mainly of Latin and Greek origin. The process of borrowing has intensified with the sweeping development of science and technology, means of communication, globalization process, political, economic and military relations, etc. English has become an international language and has accumulated an impressive word-stock of more than 2 million lexical units and it started to share this treasure with other languages of the world. Apart from the necessity of borrowing to meet new communicative requirements, there was and still is much redundant borrowing. In particular historical situations, the use of words of another language was, to a certain extent, a matter of fashion or prestige. This applied to donor languages such as French, Latin, which played an important part as languages of international communication, scholarship and learning. French remained an important source of lexical borrowing in the Modern English period, reflecting the character of relations in various spheres of life. Gradually English absorbed about 70% of its modern word stock from various languages of the world and created a rich vocabulary of international words, which now is generously giving to most languages of the world. Borrowing from English now is highly motivated by the rapid development of science and technology, economy, culture, etc. in the USA and Great Britain and the necessity to coin new words or use existing words to express new concepts. Communication and social, political, military and economic relations of the world community have developed to such an extent that now new advanced technologies and goods spread all over the globe, the English language in this case is being used as an international language [1, p.77-80].

It is well known that even within the same language we observe considerable semantic change of lexical units. This concerns not only different English variants, but their regional dialects as well. Thus, in Boston or New England dialect one comes across familiar simple English words with their meanings unusually changed. For example: *He fetched him a kick = He hit him. He thought for a spell = He thought for a while*. In Pennsylvania Dutch - a kind of pidgin-type dialect one can discover that a religious group is preserving elements of German, with specific syntactic structures: *come and eat yourself = come and have dinner with us, help yourself; if I eat myself = if I pay for my food; He wants rain = He predicts rain*. Resulting from this we expect the degree of change to be greater in borrowings.

The words, being borrowed from this or that language, continue to develop their semantic structure under the influence of a given extralinguistic reality of the given linguistic community: historic conditions, traditions, culture, development of science and technology, etc. This fact conditions the difference in the semantic structure of lexemes, which is also connected with the fact that the borrowing of this or that lexeme took place at different times, and that means that the semantic structure of the lexeme at the time was different or could be different. Besides, the lexeme could be borrowed by different languages in different way: a) borrowing the entire semantic structure of the given lexeme; b) borrowing by various languages of only part of the semantic structure of the lexeme, and in this case they may borrow the same part (as being very important at the moment) or every language could borrow different parts of the given semantic structure to be further developed in the target languages. The process of borrowing of lexical units may, like other ways of augmenting the vocabulary, be motivated by the need for adequate denotation of new cognitive contents or concepts

arising in the process of the material and spiritual development of society [2, p.39-51]. Let's take a simple example borrowed from Old Italian: the lexeme 'cab' (*taxicab*) - an Old Italian term for *goat* (*Modern Italian – capra; cabra* in Spanish, and *capra* in Romanian). The first carriages bounced so violently that they reminded of goats jumping on a hillside. It is interesting to mention the fact that in Romanian and Russian the seat where the coachman of a cart or a coach would sit had the name of “capra” and “козлы” correspondingly. In Chile a two-wheeled cart is called “cabra”.

The extra-linguistic causes are determined by the social nature of the language: they are observed in changes of meaning resulting from tempo of development of the human mind and the social, political, economic, cultural and technical progress of the given speaking community. Let's take the lexeme “car”. In Romanian the semantic structure of the word “car” is usually given as follows: 1. A four wheeled animal driven vehicle; 2. The quantity of the material carried in such a vehicle; 3. Part of a mechanic saw; 4. Part of typewriter. In English the following semantic structure is found: 1. Motor-car or train-car; 2. On a railway in Great Britain: coach, dining car, sleeping car; in the USA also wagon for goods, freight car; street car (tram); 3. The part of a balloon, airship, or lift used by passengers; 4. (poet.). Wheeled vehicle, chariot: the car of the sun god. The Italian *carro* has been used to form quite a number of words and word combinations (about 150) with various meanings. The English *car* was the source of creating more than 300 words and word combinations in the field of technical terminology, about 60 terms have been found in Spanish, quite a number of word combination exist in French going back to the Latin *carrus*. Only German has a limited number of words of the same origin: Karren, Karosse, Karussell [3]. Thus, the Latin *carrus*, which initially meant *a four wheeled animal driven vehicle* has gradually changed its meaning depending on the development of science and technology. Most of the new terms have been formed in the English language and are borrowed into other languages. The Romance languages can accept such terms easily, the familiar term *car* being part of many compound terms. Sometimes the lexical units “return” completely changed and difficult to recognize. Thus, the term *branch* in English (from the Italian *branca*) was borrowed into Romanian (*branșă, a debranșă*) and it forms an etymological doublet with the existing word *brâncă – hand*, used in colloquial speech.

The causes of borrowing are obviously of sociolinguistic motivation. Apart from the necessity of borrowing to meet new communicative requirements, there was undoubtedly much borrowing which did not serve this purpose, redundant borrowing. In particular historical situations, the use of words of another language was, to a certain extent, certainly, also a matter of fashion or prestige. This applied to donor languages such as French, which was used for several centuries as the first or second language of the upper class of the English society. It also applied to Latin, which had up to the XVI<sup>th</sup> century played an important part as the language of science and learning. French remained an important source of lexical borrowing in Modern English period, reflecting the character of the relations in various spheres of life. Gradually English absorbed about 70% of its modern word stock from various languages of the world and created a rich vocabulary of international words, which English now is generously giving to most languages of the world. Borrowing from English now is highly motivated by the rapid development of science and technology, economy, culture, etc. In the USA and Great Britain and the necessity to coin new words or use existing words to express new concepts. Communication and social, political, military and economic relations of the world community have developed to such an extent that now new advanced technologies and goods spread all over the globe, the English language in this case is being used as an international language [4, p.39-51].

An English technical metalanguage is being spread all over the world becoming part of various languages. As a good example may serve the metalanguage of informational technologies or informational terminology, which is practically used in most countries. Even in cases when there exist equivalents in the native languages to name some concepts, as a rule, the English term is usually preferred in a more scientific functional style. English has become very popular and is widely taught in the majority of educational institutions and this makes it easier to borrow lexical units from the English language. Tens of thousands of English words have been borrowed by Romanian and have further contributed to the reromanization process, because most of the borrowed words are of Latin or Romance origin, or are words coined by means of morphemes of Latin and Greek origin. A large number of etymological doublets (triplets, n-plets) have appeared in Romanian due to the adoption of large number of lexemes during the transition period to the Market economy. Thus, the above mentioned lexical unit “branch” coming from the Italian “branca” now it has in Romanian two units originating from the same word: “branșă” and “brâncă”. The word “market”, (from the Italian - “mercata”) has been

recently borrowed into Romanian (market, marketing), and it also has quite a number of “relatives” here: *mercantil, comerciant marfa, marchidan, iarmaroc, mercerie, merceologie*. In the colloquial functional style on TV we find out quite a number of words, which are practically not translated into Romanian: *speech, briefing, visa, fast-food, charter, baner* (from the English banner), *caravan* (in the meaning of vehicle or a kind of transportation means), bridge, item, etc. [5, p.54]; You can hear on TV sentences like .. “*de ținut un speech la microfon...*, (registered on May, 10, 2003) *Aveți un așa look de prezentatoare...*, *Superbook a fost editată în anul 1930...*, *Comisia a supervizat (the English supervise) activitatea...*, *Se fac inserții (insertions) sociale pentru categorii defavorizate...*, *Asistentul maternal social sau mai popular mamele sociale ale copiilor abandonati...*, (registered on February, 28, 2003) ...*sistemul educațional...*” Thus, there is a constant stream of lexical units coming from English into Romanian, in most cases there exist synonymous lexemes in the target language, the difference being in their metasemiotic connotation. The forms of some words changed under the influence of the English morphological structure. The following examples help to demonstrate this: *principiul comunicativității, principiul transdisciplinarității și intransdisciplinarității, principiul comunicational, principiul activității participative, setul obiectivelor operaționale*. Traditionally the forms *de educație* (de învățământ), *de comunicare*, etc. were used. Here we should reiterate the fact that the existing words, like the language as a whole, are in a permanent state of change. Most words become polysemantic and their semantic structure is in permanent development and change, similar to the evolution of the given society or speaking community. It is much easier to use the already existing words to express new concepts and ideas, objects and phenomena instead of coining new words (which would have radically increased the number of words to millions). In this respect we can state that most of the words are in constant state of renovation, possessing one or more sub-meanings relatively “new”, and this or that contextual meaning of many words may be considered to be a neologism. Which of the units of the multitude of potential words and new borrowings or meanings are going to be accepted by the speaking community and become part of the official dictionary word-stock? There are various suggestions. But the most important one should be the necessity of the given unit to be used in the language of the speaking community. If there is no need, no place for a word or meaning in the given language to carry out a certain function, they will be soon dropped out of the language.

The well-known lexicologist I. Arnold [6, p.216-220] explains the above mentioned problems connected with the process of the appearance of neologisms and their acceptance by stating that Language, as well as other adaptive systems, is capable of obtaining information from the extralinguistic world and with the help of feedback makes use of it for self-optimization. If the variation proves useful, it remains in the vocabulary. The process may be observed by studying new words or neologisms. New notions constantly come into being, requiring new words to name them. Sometimes a new name is introduced for a thing or notion that continues to exist, and the older name ceases to be used. The number of words in a language is therefore not constant, the increase, as a rule, more than makes up for the leak-out. New words and expressions are created for new things irrespective of their scale of importance. Borrowings do not substitute or oust the native English units. It enriches the English word-stock, changes the stylistic shade of lexical units, their structure, homonymic and synonymic relations are formed. And one more important point is that English has borrowed a great many words from other languages, especially from Latin, Greek and Romance languages, that as a result it has formed a considerable number of international words, and still forming lots of new words by means of derivation, composition, abbreviation, clipping, blending etc. using Latin and Greek elements, boosting in this way the number of international lexemes. All these lexemes, as it was mentioned above, are readily borrowed by many other languages, which accumulate an international word stock characteristic to a great number of languages, facilitating the process of international communication. New notions constantly come into being, requiring new words to name them. Sometimes a new name is introduced for a thing or notion that continues to exist, and the older name ceases to be used. The number of words in a language is, therefore, not constant. New words and expressions are created for new things irrespective of their scale of importance. They may be all-important and concern some social relationships, or something threatening the very existence of humanity, like nuclear war. Or again the thing may be quite insignificant and short lived, like fashions in dancing, clothing, hairdo or footwear. In every case either the old words are appropriately changed in meaning or new words are borrowed, or more often coined out of the existing language material either according to the patterns and ways already productive in the language at a given stage of its development or creating new ones. We should also mention the fact that borrowings do not substitute or oust the native English units. It enriches the English

word-stock, changes the stylistic shade of lexical units, their structure, homonymic and synonymic relations are formed. The word *rich* in Old French, "*riche*" meant "powerful"; it came to mean wealthy only by semantic extension. Originally from the German, Reich. In Modern German adj. "reich" means *rich, abundant, generous*, and the noun "Reich" – *country, kingdom, empire, state, world, sphere, region*. If we compare this lexical unit with the semantic structures of the corresponding lexical units in Spanish (*rico*), Italian (*ricco*) and French (*riche*) we discover that there is much coincidence, except the meaning of "Reich" – *country, which is specific only to German*.

Here we should also draw our attention to such a super-productive type of word-building as abbreviation, shortening and blending. There exist dictionaries of about 500 000 curtailed units. Analyzing them we have come to the conclusion that they are also in a constant semantic change. Many of them become independent and are viewed by the speakers as independent lexical units. Thus, the term LASER (Light Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation) has been used to form more than 500 stable word combinations only in English! The absolute majority of the speakers have no idea that *laser* is an acronym. More than that, *laser* is very often used as an adjective (*laser beam*), a polysemantic verb has been formed (to lase), *laser* has been further curtailed and is part of many abbreviated units: LIF - Laser Interference Filter; LFL - Laser Flash Lamp; LID - Laser Intrusion Detection; LIED - Laser Initiating Explosion Devise, etc. [7]. Laser has been borrowed into many languages, practically becoming an international term, but not viewed as an abbreviation. Thus, in French, Italian, German and Russian, most of the 500 English stable combinations having *laser* as one of the elements (an in texts they are usually abbreviated), are rendered regularly with *laser* being preserved.

Phraseological units, including sayings and proverbs should be mentioned here as well. They are also subject to change. These units start in the language by being regularly used in speech and gradually using their motivation and losing the individual meanings of the component elements in order to express a new global unmotivated meaning. More than that, sometimes they are intentionally changed to produce a certain stylistic impact on the reader, listener or televiewer. Thus for example: *A bird in hand is worth two in the bush* – *Time was passing his bird in the bush no nearer the hand* – *He was to be approached with a sizable bird in hand*. This idiomatic expression in different European languages now developed different forms: Romanian - *Nu da pasărea din mână pe cea de pe gard*; Russian - *Лучше синица в руке, чем журавль на небе*. Here we could give examples of deformations of idioms in Russian and Romanian. An example of advertising beer on Russian TV: *Лучше бутылка пива в руке, чем прекрасная девица на песке*. Romanian TV: *Pară mălăiață în cavitatea bucală a consumatorului* (deformation of: *Pară mălăiață în gura lui Nătăf-leață*). Thus, we should conclude that the process of semantic change in case of unmotivated units is prominent and should be taken into consideration in the scientific research in the field. All the lexemes of the language are subject to change of the semantic structure with the development of the speaking community and of the world civilization as a whole.

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