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HISTORICAL LINGUISTICS?

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Lecture Four :

Borrowing

Introduction

It is common for one language to take words from another language and make them part of its own vocabulary: these are called *loanwords* and the process is called linguistic *borrowing*.

Borrowing, however, is not restricted to just lexical items taken from one language into another; **any linguistic material - sounds, phonological rules, grammatical morphemes, syntactic patterns, semantic associations, discourse strategies or whatever** -- which has its origin in a foreign language can be borrowed, that is, can be taken over so that it becomes part of the borrowing language.

Borrowing normally implies a certain degree of bilingualism for at least some people in both the language which borrows (sometimes called the *recipient language*) and the language which is borrowed from (often called the *donor language*).

We will attempt to illustrate with some examples to answer the questions below.

- (1) what are loanwords?
- (2) why are words borrowed?
- (3) what aspects of language can be borrowed and how are they borrowed?
- (4) what are the methods for determining that something is a loanword and for identifying the source languages from which words are borrowed?; and
- (5) what happens to borrowed forms when they are taken into another language?

◉ What is a Loanword?

A loanword is a lexical item (a word) which has been 'borrowed' from another language, a word which originally was not part of the vocabulary of the recipient language but was adopted from some other language and made part of the borrowing language's vocabulary.

French borrowed words from English, for example *bifteck* 'beefsteak', among many others.

Loanwords are extremely common;
some languages have many.

There are extensive studies of the many
Scandinavian and French loans in English;

German and Arabic loans in Spanish; Native
American loanwords in Spanish and

Spanish loans in various Native American
languages (called *hispanisms*);

Arabic in various languages of Africa and Asia.
Just consider these examples ;

- ◉ **Coffee** (Arabic *qahwah* 'infusion, beverage', originally said to have meant some kind of 'wine', borrowed through the Turkish pronunciation *kahveh* from which European languages get their term.
- ◉ **Potato** (Taino (Caribbean language of Haiti) *patata*, borrowed through Spanish *batata*, *patata* to many other languages.
- ◉ **Sugar** (ultimately from Arabic *sukkar*, through Old French *f'ucree*).

◉ *Why do Languages Borrow from One Another?*

1- Languages borrow words from other languages primarily because of ***need*** and ***prestige***. When speakers of a language acquire some new item or concept from abroad, they ***need*** a new term to go along with the new acquisition; often a foreign name is borrowed along with the new concept.

This explains for; '***coffee***' (Russian ***kofo***, Finnish ***kahvi***, Japanese ***kohii***);

'***tobacco***' (Japanese ***tabako*** 'cigarette, ***tobacco***', ultimately from Arabic ***tabiiq*** 'a herb which produced euphoria' via Spanish ***tabaco***, since languages presumably needed new names for these new concepts when they were acquired.

2- The other main reason why words are taken over from another language is for *prestige*, because the foreign term for some reason is highly esteemed. Borrowings for prestige are sometimes called 'luxury' loans.

- For example, English could have done perfectly well with only native terms for as well as many other terms of '**cuisine**' from French - *cuisine* itself is from French *cuisine* '**kitchen**' - because French had more social status and was considered more prestigious than English during the period of Norman French dominance in England (1066.-1300).

3- Some loans involve a third, much rarer (and much less important) reason for borrowing, the opposite of prestige: borrowing due to **negative evaluation**, the adoption of the foreign word to **be derogatory**.

English **assassin** and the similar words with the same meaning in a number of other European languages (French **assassin**, Italian **assassino**, Spanish **asesino** 'assassin') may be another example; *assassin* is ultimately from Arabic **lJaffiijin** 'hashish-eater' (for the name of an eleventh-century Muslim sect who would intoxicate themselves with hashish or cannabis when preparing to kill someone of public standing; they had a reputation for butchering opponents, hence the later sense of 'murderer for hire or for fanatical reasons).