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HISTORICAL LINGUISTICS?

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LECTURE SIX: CLUES FROM COGNATES

When a word in **two (or more)** languages is suspected of being borrowed, if it has **legitimate cognates** (*with regular sound correspondences*) *across sister languages of one family*, but is *found in only one language (or a few languages) of another family*, then the **donor language** is usually one of the languages for which the form in question has cognates in the related languages. Consider the examples,

Spanish *ganso* 'goose' is borrowed from Germanic *gans*; Germanic has cognates, for example German *Gans*, English *goose*, and so on, but other Romance languages have no true cognate of Spanish *ganso*.

Rather, they have such things as French *oie*, Italian *oca*, and others reflecting Latin *iinser* 'goose' (which is cognate with Germanic *gans* 'goose', but not the source of borrowed Spanish *ganso*). Thus, the direction of borrowing is from Germanic to Spanish.

Geographical and ecological clues

The geographical and ecological associations of words suspected of being loans can often provide information helpful to determining whether they are borrowed and what the identity of the donor language is.

For example, the geographical and ecological remoteness from earlier English-speaking territory of **zebra**, **gnu**, **impala** and **aardvark** - animals originally found only in Africa - makes these words likely candidates for loanwords in English.

Indeed, they were borrowed from local languages in Africa with which speakers of European languages came into contact when they entered the habitats where these animals are found

- **zebra** is from a Congo language (borrowed through French),
- **gnu** from a Khoe language,
- **impala** from Zulu.

Inferences from geography and ecology are not as strong as those from the phonological and morphological criteria mentioned above; however, when coupled with other information, the inferences which they provide can be useful.

Other semantic clues

A still weaker kind of inference, related to the last criterion, can sometimes be obtained from the semantic domain of a suspected loan.

For example, English words such as *squaw*, *papoose*, *powwow*, and so on have paraphrases involving 'Indian' Native American', that is, 'Indian woman', 'Indian baby', 'Indian house' and so on; this suggests possible borrowing from American Indian languages. Upon further investigation, this supposition proves true; these are borrowed from Algonquian languages into English.

This criterion is only a rough indication of possibilities. Sources for the borrowing must still be sought, and it is necessary to try to determine the exact nature of the loans, if indeed borrowings are involved.

Calques (loan translations, semantic loans)

In loanwords, something of both the phonetic form and meaning of the word in the donor language is transferred to the borrowing language, but it is also possible to borrow, in effect, just the meaning, and instances of this are called *calques* or *loan translations*, as illustrated by the often-repeated example of *black market*, which owes its origin in English to a loan translation of German *Schwarzmarkt*, composed of *schwarz* 'black' and *Markt* 'market'. *Other examples follow.*

- ⊙ (1) The word for '**railway**' ('**railroad**') is a calque based on a translation of 'iron' 'road/way' in a number of languages French *chemin de fer* (literally 'road of iron');
- ⊙ German *Eisenbahn* (*Eisen* 'iron' + *Bahn* 'path, road')
- ⊙ (2) - A number of languages have calques based on English *skyscraper*, as for example: German *Wolkenkratzer* (*Wolken* 'clouds' + *kratzer* 'scratcher, scraper'); French *gratte-de ciel* (*gratte* 'gratte, scrape' + *ciel* 'sky').

Emphatic foreignisation

Sometimes, speakers go out of their way to make borrowed forms sound even more foreign by substituting sounds which seem to them more foreign than the sounds which the word in the donor language actually has.

These examples of further '**foreignisation**' are usually found in loans involving slang or high registers; it is somewhat akin to hypercorrection.

The English borrowing from French *coup de grace* (literally, 'blown hit of grace') is more often rendered without the final *s*, as *lku de gra/*, than as *lku de gras/*, where many English speakers expect French words spelled with *s* to lack *s* in the pronunciation and have extended this to eliminate also the *lsl* of *grace*, though in French the *s* of *grace* is pronounced, [gras].

The phenomenon is illustrated in examples such the frequent news media pronunciations of *Azerbaijan* and *Beijing* with the somewhat more

foreign-sounding /ʒ/, [azerbaiʒan]

and [beiʒi :n], rather than the less exotic but

more traditional pronunciation with [azer baiʒan] (with penultimate stress in the latter).

Cultural Inferences

It is not difficult to see how loanwords can have an important historical impact on a culture - just consider what the evening news in English might be like without *money* and *dollars*, or *religion*, *politicians* and *crime*.

These words are all loans:

(1) **money**: borrowed in Middle English times from French (Old French *moneie*; compare Modern French *monnaie* 'money, coin'), ultimately from Latin *moneta*, from the name of *Juno moneta*.

(2) **dollar**: borrowed into English in the sixteenth century from Low German and Dutch **daler**, ultimately from High German **thaler**, in its full form **Joachimsthaler**, a place in Bohemia, literally 'of Joachim's valley', from where the German **thaler**, a large silver coin of the 1600s, came, from a silver mine opened there in 1516.

(3) religion: borrowed from French *religion*, first attested in English in 1200 (ultimately from Latin *religion-em*, of contested etymology, said to be from either *relegere* 'to read over again' or *religare* 'to bind, religate'. reflecting the state of life bound by monastic vows).