



SEMANTIC ADAPTATION OF BORROWINGS IN LANGUAGE COGNITION

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Abstract: This article examines the process of semantic adaptation of borrowings within the framework of language cognition. The study analyzes how borrowed lexical units undergo semantic transformation after entering a recipient language and how cognitive mechanisms influence their reinterpretation. Particular attention is paid to semantic narrowing, broadening, metaphorization, and conceptual restructuring of loanwords in English and other languages. The research is based on cognitive linguistics, sociolinguistics, and language contact theory. The findings demonstrate that semantic adaptation reflects not only linguistic change but also cultural interaction, globalization, and the cognitive categorization processes of language users.

Keywords: semantic adaptation, borrowings, language cognition, cognitive linguistics.

Introduction

Lexical borrowing is one of the most significant outcomes of language contact and intercultural communication. In modern linguistics, borrowed words are not considered merely imported lexical units but rather cognitively reconstructed elements integrated into the semantic system of the recipient language. The process through which borrowed items acquire modified meanings, associations, stylistic values, and conceptual functions is known as semantic adaptation. This phenomenon is closely related to language cognition because speakers interpret foreign lexical items through existing conceptual structures and cultural experiences.

From the cognitive linguistic perspective, semantic adaptation occurs because language users actively categorize and reinterpret unfamiliar lexical material. According to Langacker, meaning is grounded in human conceptualization and experience rather than existing independently from cognition. Therefore, when a borrowing enters a new linguistic environment, its meaning often changes according to the conceptual needs of the recipient speech community. Such transformations may include semantic narrowing, semantic broadening, metaphorization, amelioration, or pejoration.



Literature Review

The issue of semantic adaptation of borrowings has been widely investigated in modern linguistics, particularly within cognitive and sociolinguistic approaches. Early studies by Uriel Weinreich focused on language contact and demonstrated that borrowed lexical units often undergo semantic transformation after entering a recipient language system. His research emphasized that semantic change is closely connected with bilingualism and intercultural communication. Einar Haugen further developed the theory of borrowing by explaining that lexical adaptation involves not only phonetic and grammatical integration but also semantic compatibility with the conceptual system of the recipient language. Haugen considered borrowing a dynamic cognitive process influenced by communicative needs and cultural context.

In cognitive linguistics, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson analyzed the role of conceptual metaphor in meaning formation. Their theory explains how borrowed words may acquire metaphorical meanings through human cognitive experience. Ronald Langacker also contributed significantly to the field by arguing that lexical meaning is grounded in conceptualization and mental categorization rather than isolated linguistic structures.

The historical development of English borrowings was extensively examined by Baugh and Cable, who analyzed semantic changes in French and Latin loanwords throughout the evolution of the English language. Similarly, Philip Durkin explored the semantic transformation of borrowings in English and demonstrated how social, technological, and cultural factors influence lexical reinterpretation. Modern studies also investigate borrowing within globalization and digital communication. David Crystal emphasized that international communication accelerates semantic adaptation and promotes the spread of hybrid lexical meanings across languages. In addition, Kövecses highlighted the cognitive role of metaphor and conceptual transfer in the semantic evolution of borrowed lexical units.

Results And Discussion

A notable example of semantic narrowing can be observed in the French borrowing *chef*. In French, *chef* originally meant “leader” or “head.” However, after entering English, the word became semantically specialized and now primarily refers to a professional cook or head cook in a restaurant. This adaptation demonstrates how English speakers selected one culturally relevant aspect of the original meaning and eliminated the broader semantic scope. Cognitive prioritization of culinary professionalism within English-speaking society contributed to this semantic restriction.

Semantic broadening represents another common type of adaptation.



The borrowing *garage*, also derived from French, initially denoted a place where vehicles were kept. In English, however, the word developed additional meanings, including automobile repair workshops and service stations. This semantic expansion reflects industrial and technological developments influencing conceptual categorization. The borrowing adapted to the practical communicative needs of English speakers and therefore acquired broader semantic functionality. Technological development frequently accelerates semantic adaptation. One of the most illustrative examples is the term *virus*. Originally derived from Latin and used primarily in medical discourse, the word later acquired a metaphorical meaning in computer technology. The expression *computer virus* conceptualizes malicious software as a biological infection capable of reproduction and destruction. According to Lakoff and Johnson, metaphor is a cognitive mechanism through which individuals understand abstract concepts using familiar experiential domains. In this case, the human understanding of disease provided a conceptual framework for interpreting digital threats.

Semantic adaptation is particularly visible in the global spread of English borrowings into other languages. Borrowed English words often undergo substantial reinterpretation within recipient cultures. In Japanese, for example, the borrowing *manshon* (derived from the English word “mansion”) does not signify a luxurious residence as in English but instead refers to an apartment building. This semantic shift emerged because Japanese speakers associated the foreign term with modern urban housing rather than aristocratic property. Consequently, the borrowing acquired a culturally specific conceptual meaning different from its original English sense. A similar process can be observed in post-Soviet and Central Asian linguistic environments, where English technological and media-related borrowings have become increasingly common. In Uzbek discourse, words such as *trend*, *online*, and *bloger* are widely used in social media and journalism. However, these borrowings frequently develop semantic nuances absent in English. The word *trend*, for instance, is commonly associated not only with statistical or social tendencies but also with temporary internet popularity and viral digital content. This semantic extension reflects the influence of globalization and digital communication on cognitive interpretation.

The semantic adaptation of borrowings also depends on sociocultural attitudes and evaluative perception. Borrowed words may acquire either positive or negative connotations after entering the recipient language. For example, the English borrowing *bureaucracy*, originally derived from French administrative terminology, developed strongly negative associations related



to inefficiency and excessive regulation in political discourse. Such semantic pejoration reflects collective sociocultural experiences that shape conceptual evaluations within the speech community. In some cases, borrowings undergo amelioration and gain prestigious or expressive meanings. The Italian borrowing *opera* initially referred specifically to a dramatic musical performance. In English, however, it gradually acquired broader stylistic associations with emotional intensity, theatricality, and artistic sophistication. Expressions such as “soap opera” demonstrate how semantic adaptation may simultaneously broaden meaning and create new stylistic functions.

The process of semantic adaptation further illustrates the dynamic relationship between language and cognition. Borrowed words survive in the recipient language only when they become conceptually meaningful for speakers. Haugen argues that successful borrowing requires semantic compatibility with the conceptual structure of the recipient language community. Therefore, semantic adaptation functions not merely as linguistic change but also as cognitive integration. From a psycholinguistic perspective, speakers interpret unfamiliar borrowings through analogy, association, and inferencing. One classic example is the word *hamburger*, originally derived from the German place name *Hamburg*. English speakers cognitively reanalyzed the word into the components *ham* and *burger*, which later enabled the creation of new lexical forms such as *cheeseburger* and *fishburger*. This example demonstrates how cognitive reinterpretation contributes to lexical productivity and semantic innovation.

Conclusion

Overall, semantic adaptation of borrowings reveals that language contact is fundamentally a cognitive and cultural process. Borrowed words are continuously reshaped according to the conceptual systems, communicative practices, and sociocultural experiences of recipient language communities. Consequently, semantic adaptation not only enriches vocabulary but also reflects broader processes of globalization, intercultural interaction, and conceptual evolution.

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