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Loanwords in a Usage-Based Model

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1 Introduction

Previous studies have often treated loanwords as a means for investigating something else, for example the cultural or social history of the borrowing language (cf. Jespersen 1905, Haugen 1972 [1950]) or its phonological system (cf. Broselow 1987, Itô & Mester 1995). Lacking so far is an account that treats loanwords as phenomena in their own right, i.e. a theory which deals with both their formal and their semantic aspects as well as their relation to the linguistic system as a whole (but cf. Weinreich 1953).

We claim that such an account is necessary for any theory of loanwords, and lay out the general properties of such a theory, taking the usage-based approach that unites various cognitively-oriented theories of language (Langacker 1987, Forthcoming, Bybee 1988, Lakoff 1987).

Our main focus will be on complementing previous typologies of loanwords, which have concentrated on the formal side, with an account of the different conceptual types of loanwords.

Formal typologies, such as that of Haugen (1972 [1950]), differentiate between loanwords (words whose form is constructed exclusively on the basis of the source language form, like English armadillo from Spanish armadillo), loanblends (words whose form is constructed partly on the basis of the source language form, and partly on the basis of borrowing language material, e.g. English apple strudel from German Apfelstrudel), and loan translations (e.g. Spanish rascacielos from English skyscraper).

These typologies do not deal with the semantic processes which accompany the borrowing of a form. Haugen (1972 [1950]: 85) simply notes that ‘[f]or all of [these types] it is taken for granted that semantic importation has taken place.’ From a cognitive perspective, this assumption is implausible: the meaning of a word is that part of the knowledge network of a speaker which is accessed via this word. Obviously, this partial knowledge network cannot be imported into the head of another speaker.
Even if we abstract away from the individual speaker to some entity such as a ‘speech community,’ we do not solve this problem: the meaning of a word, from this perspective, would be that part of the shared knowledge of the speech community which is likely to be accessed by a member of the community via this word. The shared (linguistic and extra-linguistic) knowledge of one speech community cannot in any meaningful way be said to be imported by a different speech community. Rather, the meaning of a loanword must be constructed on the basis of the shared knowledge of the borrowing community. Thus, as we will show below, both form and meaning have to be re-created by the speakers of the borrowing language.

In this paper, we will give a detailed account of types of borrowing from a semantic perspective. In other words, we will focus on the types of semantic processes which occur when a word is first borrowed, as well as the reorganization of the conceptual (or semantic) system which occurs as the word becomes fully integrated into the borrowing language.

2 The usage-based model

Let us briefly introduce some crucial aspects of the theoretical framework we will use in the following discussion, the family of models referred to as usage-based theories (cf. Barlow and Kemmer Forthcoming, Kemmer and Israel 1994). Our terminology comes mainly from the version known as Cognitive Grammar developed in Langacker (1987, 1991a, 1991b, Forthcoming).

2.1 The linguistic system as a network of symbolic units

First, we will refer to symbolic units, which are the conventionalized signs of a language, i.e., bipolar units consisting of a form (or phonological pole) and a meaning (or semantic pole). Such units can be lexical, i.e. they can be words (e.g. walk) or lexicalized word combinations of various sizes (moon walk, power walk, or walk the dog); they can also be grammatical, such as the transitive construction (NP-V-NP, e.g. Everybody walks the dog), or the passive (NP-be-V-ed-by NP, e.g. Everybody is walked by their dog). In Cognitive Grammar it is assumed that lexical and grammatical units differ from each other mainly in regard to how specific vs. general their meaning is.

Second, we will refer to the notion of entrenchment. The degree of entrenchment of a unit is the degree to which it is conventionalized both for the individual speaker (i.e. how routinized it is cognitively) and the speech community (i.e. the degree to which it is shared across speakers). These aspects correlate with a cluster of properties, such as perceptual salience, familiarity, and frequency of usage.
Third, we assume that symbolic units are interconnected, forming a bipolar network; the relations among units can be of various kinds (e.g. semantic similarity, phonological similarity, taxonomic relations, antonymy, etc.). In their totality they form a structured matrix of units and relations.

Finally, we need to specify what we mean when we say that a symbolic unit ‘has’ a semantic and a phonological pole: this does not mean, of course, that words ‘have’ or ‘possess’ meaning in the literal sense; instead they are meaningful by virtue of providing entry points through which entire domains of knowledge can be accessed. For example, a word like walk activates several conceptual domains—most obviously SPATIAL DISPLACEMENT, but also KINETICS (i.e. a certain way of moving one’s legs and arms), SPEED (not as slow as crawl, not as fast as run), as well as certain cultural associations, such as TO BE AVOIDED AT ALL COSTS (if you live in Houston or any other urban center in the South or the West of the United States). Linguistic expressions are capable of meaning by virtue of selecting out (or profiling) a point of intersection of various domains. A set of domains which has such an intersection is referred to as a domain matrix. Thus, meaning is regarded as being encyclopedic in nature; there is no precise cut-off point beyond which the knowledge activated by a word can be said to not be part of its meaning anymore. As will become clear however, we can in some cases distinguish between semantic domains that are more central to a word’s meaning (primary domains) and those that are less central (secondary domains).

2.2 The bilingual speaker from a usage-based perspective

The usage-based model outlined in the preceding section gives us a perspective on the native speaker which is very different from the one taken by more traditional models (such as generative grammar). Instead of viewing the native speaker’s knowledge of his or her language as consisting of neatly compartmentalized ‘modules’ of various sorts, it is seen as a loosely structured inventory of symbolic units. A similar view of linguistic knowledge was taken by some of the latter-day structuralists, e.g. André Martinet in his Introduction to Weinreich’s Languages in Contact:

...linguistic diversity begins...within one and the same man. It is not enough to point out that each individual is a battle-field for conflicting linguistic types and habits, and, at the same time, a permanent source of linguistic interference

(Martinet 1953: vii).

For Martinet’s ‘linguistic types and habits’ read ‘entrenched schemas and routines,’ and you have what is in essence, a usage-based view of the linguistic system as a dynamic and diversified network structure.
This view of the linguistic system throws an interesting new light on bilingualism, which has not been fully explored in the cognitive literature. Martinet drew attention to the fact that his perspective on linguistic knowledge casts doubt on a monolithic conception of where one language ends and the next begins:

What we heedlessly and somewhat rashly call ‘a language’ is the aggregate of millions of such microcosms many of which evince such aberrant linguistic comportment that the question arises whether they should not be grouped in other ‘languages’

(Martinet 1953: vii).

In other words, rather than viewing language as a well-delineated set of lexical items and syntactic rules, the usage-based model sees it as an open-ended collection of linguistic expressions (i.e. pairings of form and meaning). A bilingual, from this perspective, is simply someone whose linguistic system includes units used by two different speech communities (i.e. units from ‘different languages’). This means, of course that bilingualism is a matter of degree, ranging from full native-like command of two languages to knowledge of a few isolated expressions from a language other than one’s native language. In the linguistic system of a bilingual, the expressions belonging to one language are not isolated from the expressions belonging to another language. Instead all expressions form a single network in which the expressions belonging to one language may hang together more closely due to their frequent co-activation; but this greater cohesion is a matter of degree. Once we view language in this way we can define the initial usage-event of a loanword as the activation of a lexical item which is peripheral but nevertheless connected to the currently active portion of the network.

3 A conceptual typology of loanwords

In this section, we will present our conceptual typology of loanwords. There are three logically possible types of loanwords from a conceptual perspective. First, a word may be borrowed into a language to refer to a new referent/concept. Second, a word may be borrowed into a language to refer to an existing referent/concept. This existing referent/concept may or may not already be lexicalized. Third, an existing word of the borrowing language may take on a new meaning under the influence of the source language (this has typically been referred to as semantic borrowing).

We will first discuss our view of the borrowing process in general, and then discuss each of these types in turn. We will show that none of these types involves an “import” of meaning.
3.1 The conceptual integration of loanwords

From a usage-based perspective, lexical borrowing consists of two processes: an initial usage-event (the borrowing event) and a process of conventionalization. Let us briefly look at each of these in turn.

The initial usage-event is an intra-personal (i.e. psychological) process. It occurs when a bilingual speaker (in the sense of the term introduced in Section 2.2) realizes an expressive intention by choosing a source language word in a borrowing-language context. This is essentially the phenomenon that has been described in the literature as **code-switching**. However, it differs from the way the latter is typically defined in that it is not restricted to spontaneous uses in a speech situation, but that it may be a conscious or an unconscious decision, and in that it may deliberately occur in the context of writing.

There seem to be two primary motivations for such a borrowing event. First, the speaker may choose the source language word because he or she feels that it activates more precisely than any borrowing-language word a specific profile within a given domain matrix. This seems to be the primary motivation for the deliberate kind of borrowing that we find in writing, but it also occurs spontaneously in speech. It is simply one case of a speaker utilizing his or her linguistic resources with a focus on meaning rather than linguistic convention.

Second, the speaker may choose the source language word because it is easier to access than the closest corresponding borrowing language word. This will typically be the case when a speaker talks in the borrowing language about a topic which he or she usually talks about in the source language. The source language vocabulary pertaining to such a topic will be activated more frequently and hence be more entrenched than the borrowing language vocabulary. Most linguists who are non-native speakers of English will be familiar with this phenomenon: since they usually read, write and talk about linguistics in English, frequent terms like **noun phrase** will find their way into their speech even where their native language provides a semantically identical, perfectly acceptable term (like German *Nomen*alphrase, Portuguese *sintagma nominal*, Dutch *naamwoordelijke groep*, etc.).

This initial borrowing event by itself will not result in what is commonly referred to as **lexical borrowing**, i.e. a source language word used in such an event has not automatically become a loanword in the borrowing language. To become a loanword, it must become conventionalized in the borrowing language. In other words, it must spread through the speech community in a series of usage events, each of which will affect its integration into the conceptual system of the borrowing language.
3.2 New word for a new concept

The first type of lexical borrowing we will examine refers to the frequently occurring case of a speech community being confronted with a completely new referent, be it because of a new discovery or through the invention of a new product. The new item at the time of introduction lacks links to any shared and established conceptual knowledge and it also lacks a linguistic label. Under these circumstances it is often the case that referent in question brings its label with it. Note that linguistic form is not imported in this process, but rather re-created; speakers of the borrowing language will approximate the form within the confines of their own phonological system. Likewise, it is not possible to import semantic structure. It, too, has to be re-created—in this case within the confines of the conceptual system of the borrowing language.

As mentioned above, the conception of an encyclopedic semantics entails that we have an elaborated knowledge network to which each single lexical item is connected. Each symbolic unit constitutes an access point to the conceptual network, and it follows from this that each new symbolic unit needs to be integrated into the overall network of conceptual structure.

This knowledge network is based on personal as well as culturally shared experience; it is an intricate system that builds up only gradually. A new unit will connect to existing structure as well as add further particulars. It should be straightforward that the semantic network of the average speaker in the borrowing language is different from that of a speaker of the borrowing language. It follows from this view of semantics that although this type of borrowing might give the impression of importing all the conceptual structure of the loanword from the borrowing language, we have to realize that this is not possible. We can assume that little or nothing of the intricate knowledge network of the source language comes along with the referent. Instead, we are claiming that the borrowing language gradually builds up its own specific network, a process naturally leading to semantic differences between the corresponding words in the source and the borrowing language.

Typically, the meaning developing in the borrowing language is affected by the borrowing context itself. Speakers of the borrowing language then abstract the recurring similarities of the context of the first usage events and integrate these into their semantic network.

A case in point is the term *Zeppelin*. The first attested usage (cf. *OED*) in English occurred in 1900 when zeppelins were first invented. At this point the new innovation was still referred to as ‘the Zeppelin Air-ship,’ a descriptive phrase rather than a loanword. Borrowing is a gradual process and at a time when there are only very isolated usage events by a few speakers, we cannot say that a word has been integrated into the language. The word *Zeppelin* was actually borrowed into English during the first world war. The awareness of the existence of
this kind of aircraft suddenly increased dramatically when Germany used it as a military device. Except for the loan calque *air-ship* (from German *Luftschiff*), there was at the time no existing term in English for this recent innovation.

The borrowing context was so influential as to determine the meaning of the word to a high degree: in English *Zeppelin* now refers to a ‘German dirigible for military use,’ whereas the German word *Zeppelin* simply means ‘blimp.’ This difference can be accounted for by saying that the word *Zeppelin* for an English speaker profiles a more restricted and particular domain within the domain matrix of aircraft; the profile being on the intersection of the domains of AIRCRAFT, WAR, and GERMANY. A German speaker, on hearing the same word, also activates the domain of AIRCRAFT but might only have a very weak activation of the WAR domain. Instead, the meaning of the word *Zeppelin* in German is determined by the predominant current use of the referent, which is to function as a vehicle of advertisements. In other words, the domain of COMMERCIAL ADVERTISING is part of the domain matrix in German but not in English (the same intersection of domains is profiled in English by the word *blimp*). We can thus conclude that the word *Zeppelin*, though (originally) referring to the same real world referent, has taken on quite distinct meanings in the source and the borrowing languages.

### 3.3 New word for an existing non-lexicalized concept

A further type of lexical borrowing occurs in a situation in which the source language has a word for a concept that the borrowing language has not hitherto lexicalized in a single lexical item. An example of this type is English *schadenfreude*, borrowed from German *Schadenfreude* ‘malicious joy in another’s misfortune (with a strong connotation that this misfortune is in some way deserved).’ The word seems to have pretty much the same meaning in both languages: it profiles the intersection of at least the domains of MALICIOUSNESS, JOY, and MISFORTUNE, with a somewhat weaker activation of JUSTICE.

However, although the meaning is virtually identical in both English and German, this does not mean that English ‘imported’ the meaning from German. Instead, this type of borrowing does not involve the incorporation of new knowledge into the conceptual system of the borrowing language at all; instead it simply connects an existing concept to a new form. The semantic pole of the new unit is to a large extent filled with pre-existing semantic content.

This may seem a strange claim, since *Schadenfreude* is sometimes thought of as a typical German trait, and people like to deny the prior existence of such a concept in the English culture: F. Hamilton wrote in *The Days before Yesterday* about the
...particular sentiment described in German as ‘schadenfreude’ ‘pleasure over another’s troubles’ (how characteristic it is that there should be no equivalent in any other language for this peculiarly Teutonic emotion!)... .

(Hamilton 1924: 118)

However, as Steven Pinker points out, the universality of basic human emotions makes it unlikely that such a concept did not exist prior to the borrowing of the word; the most typical reaction of an English speaker on hearing this word for the first time is instantaneous recognition:

When English speakers hear the word *Schadenfreude* for the first time, their reaction is not, “Let me see... Pleasure in another’s misfortunes... What could that possibly be? I cannot grasp the concept: my language and culture have not provided me with such a category.” Their reaction is, “You mean there’s a word for it? Cool!”.

(Pinker 1997: 367)

In fact, we do not even have to be content with appeals to the intuitive implausibility of the absence of such a concept in English: there is an English word which profiles very much the same intersection of domains. It is the verb *gloat* ‘to look upon another’s situation with smug or malicious satisfaction.’ This verb profiles the same intersection of the three primary domains MALICIOUSNESS, JOY, and MISFORTUNE. Of course, this does not mean that the two words have exactly the same meaning: the secondary domain JUSTICE is perhaps not activated by *gloat*, which instead carries connotations of a certain kind of overt behavior which is absent from *Schadenfreude*. Also, the fact that *gloat* denotes a process whereas *Schadenfreude* denotes a thing (albeit an abstract one) shows that their precise profiles differ to some degree. However, the general concept can be said to have already existed at the time the borrowing took place, evident by virtue of the fact that there was a word involving the same primary domain matrix.

However, the word still functions slightly differently in the two languages, given the different constraints of each conceptual system: there are slight meaning differences between the German and the English word *Schadenfreude*. One meaning difference has been demonstrated in Hamilton’s quote above: the fact that for at least some English speakers the abstracted knowledge from the borrowing context (i.e. the knowledge that it is a German word) is additionally activated, leading to the inference that, even if it does not describe an exclusively ‘Teutonic’ emotion, Germans may be more prone to it than people of other cultures.
3.4 New word for an existing lexicalized concept

Another possibility is that the concept is already lexicalized in the borrowing language at the time when the borrowing occurs. An example would be the borrowing into English of the German *Kindergarten* to refer to a day-care center for pre-schoolers, which already had the lexeme *nursery school* associated with it.

This process will not usually result in a simple replacement of the old word by the new word. Instead, the loanword will have its own semantic pole, which will be integrated into the conceptual system of the borrowing language in its own specific way. The semantics may either be influenced by the source language or it may be the result of the integration of contextual information present in the initial usage event, but incidental from the point of view of the source language; usually it will be a mixture of both.

Consider a word like English *angst* from German *Angst* ‘fear.’ This word is first recorded in the *OED* in translations and discussions of the psychoanalytical literature of the 1920s. The translator must have decided to borrow this word rather than translate it, because he was of the opinion that the specific meaning that it has in that literature, namely ‘neurotic fear,’ was not covered by its English equivalent *fear* (though it would have been covered by the English compound *neurotic fear*).

Where does this meaning come from? The German word *Angst* simply means ‘fear’ in its everyday use, a concept which covers neurotic fear as well as other kinds of fear. It was used in the psychoanalytic literature in this everyday meaning. The more specific reading is due to the particular view on the source of fear which is taken in that literature.

Thus, the psychoanalytic context highlights one particular domain in the domain matrix of *Angst*, namely the domain of possible causes for being afraid, and puts into profile one particular cause, namely neurosis. A German speaker reading it in this context would activate the appropriate meaning but would also activate the whole domain matrix forming its conceptual environment and know that the word *Angst* can refer to this entire domain matrix. An English speaker reading it in a translation would also be able to activate the appropriate meaning (which can be deduced from the way it is used), which would in turn activate the whole domain matrix. However, for the English speaker, in contrast to the German speaker, the domain matrix as a whole is referred to by the superordinate term *fear*. Thus, he or she would take the specific meaning of *angst*, which is induced by the context, to be its actual meaning, or in Cognitive Grammar terms, he or she would assume that the specific profile of this use of *Angst* is the only possible profile. He or she would learn *Angst* as a hyponym of *fear*. In terms of the conceptual system this means that the conceptual domain of *FEAR*, which was formerly designated by the lexeme *fear*, is now divided up between the two lexemes *Angst* and *fear*.
Evidence for this division comes from the subsequent sense development of *Angst* in English. The word was soon taken over into non-psychoanalytic contexts with its narrower meaning, something that did not happen in German. It soon came to denote a somewhat fashionable mixture of vague feelings of anguish, amorphous anxiety and guilt, as in example (1), from the *British National Corpus* (BNC):

(1) Horowitz’s adolescent angst is the usual stuff about ‘careless’ parents, pill-popping, losing your cherry, driving convertible cars into swimming pools, and rebelling against adult authority figures.

Note that *Angst* differs from *Schadenfreude* only in degree. We said that *Schadenfreude* was not lexicalized in English at the time of borrowing. This turned out to be an oversimplification, since the related concept of ‘gloating’ was lexicalized. With *Angst* the situation is slightly different: the word *fear* does not just express a related concept, but a superordinate concept. Thus, we can say that, prior the borrowing, in English the concept of ‘neurotic fear’ was included in the concept of ‘fear’ and lexicalized by the word *fear*. The issue of whether or not a concept is already lexicalized at the time of borrowing is a question of ‘more vs. less’ rather than ‘all or none.’ Hence, the borrowing types described in this and the last section are not completely distinct types, but rather different points on a continuum.

A clearer example of a word replacing an already lexicalized unit is English *ersatz*, borrowed from German *Ersatz*. The German word simply means ‘substitute, replacement, compensation.’ Its first recorded uses in English all exhibit precisely this meaning, e.g. (2):

(2) To me he is a great comfort, although no *Ersatz* for the aforesaid condition of my heart (1892, *OED*, s.v. *ersatz*).

This use seems motivated by the semantics of the source language: the author must have felt that none of the English words denoting the domains of substitution and compensation profiled the cross-section of the two domains that is profiled by the German word. However, this meaning was soon replaced by the modern meaning ‘substitute or imitation (usually, an inferior article instead of the real thing)’ (ibid.); from 1927 onward, only this use is recorded in the *OED*. Since the German word does not have this meaning, it is another example of how meaning is constructed by the speakers of the borrowing language in the process of borrowing.

The trigger for the English sense development is presumably the German compound *Ersatzkaffee* ‘substitute coffee’ (note that *ersatz coffee* is the most frequent context of occurrence of the word *ersatz* in the BNC). German *Ersatzkaffee* simply referred to a substitute for coffee with no intention to signify inferiority. In fact, there is a variant in present-day German that still has this meaning: *Kaffee-Ersatz* ‘coffee substitute.’ What seems to have happened here is that
English speakers, confronted with the word *Ersatzkaffee*, assumed that it profiled inferiority (which is, after all, a potential domain in the context of substitutes), whereas this profile was an incidental aspect of the context from the perspective of German. *Ersatzkaffee* was indeed inferior, but it would have been referred to by the same word even if it had not been inferior.

Examples of the modern English use of the word are (3a) and (3b), neither of which is possible in present-day German:

(3)  

a. A common characteristic of social life in the modern village is thus the attempt by newcomers to create an *ersatz* sense of community by founding and running local organizations... (*BNC*).

b. The story is of *ersatz* oppression and liberation, oppression by domesticity and chips in suburban Liverpool, liberation by sunshine and retsina on a Greek island holiday (*BNC*).

These examples show that the integration of *ersatz* into the conceptual system of English has led to a differentiation of the domain of *faking* and *imitation*: neither of these two words carries quite the same connotations of futility and the failure to achieve the desired goal in (3a) or the triviality in (3b).

### 3.5 New concept for an existing word

The last type of lexical borrowing we want to introduce is that of an existing word gradually taking on a new meaning (sometimes referred to as ‘semantic borrowing’). This is essentially just a particular type of the common phenomenon of semantic change. However, in this case, the change is accelerated and influenced by the existence of a similar word in another language. As with semantic change in general, there are three possible consequences of semantic borrowing: (i) the original meaning can be lost completely; (ii) the original meaning can survive alongside the new, thus making the word polysemous (if the two meanings are related) or homonymous (if they are not).

An example of the second kind is the English word *realize* that has induced a semantic change in the German word *realisieren*, which originally only meant ‘to make real’ but has started to take on the meaning ‘become aware of.’

How can we account for such a change, which is basically the reverse of everything we have looked at so far? That is, how can the concept of a word in the source language instigate a change in the semantic pole of an existing and entrenched symbolic unit in the borrowing language?
Again we assume that it is bilingual speakers who will introduce the new usage into the language. In the case of realisieren the extended usage caught on because there was in fact a small lexical gap in German. Let us look at this in a little more detail. In English, the verb to realize has four related senses: (i) ‘to be fully aware of something,’ (ii) ‘to understand something,’ (iii) ‘to present something as real,’ and (iv) ‘to make something real.’ German realisieren originally only had the last sense and there is yet another term, verwirklichen, that basically shares this meaning. Now the first sense, ‘to become fully aware of something,’ is making its way into German. This is possible because the German term bemerken, which can be regarded as the closest possible translation, lacks the notion of ‘complete awareness’ which is implicit in the meaning of realisieren. Realisieren furthermore involves much more mental activity than bemerken, which can be purely perceptual. Obviously, speakers of German had the necessary means of expressing the concept of being actively and fully aware of something; however, there was no single lexical item expressing exactly this concept.

The other two meanings that are current in English have not affected the German system. There are other words that cover the conceptual territory (e.g. begreifen ‘grasp, understand,’ umsetzen ‘make real’) and there is thus no motivation for German speakers to further extend the meaning of realisieren. Even if they will sometimes hear the word used in one of the other senses, it is unlikely that these usages will lead to a further lexicalization.

Again we can see that borrowing is no simple import of words. In the case of German realisieren, the phonological pole undergoes no change at all; and at the semantic pole we can see that only one specific sense of the English term realize has been incorporated into German.

4 Summary and conclusions

In this paper we have shown that the semantics of loanwords is not imported from the source language, but that the speakers of the borrowing language create meaning by accommodating the new unit to their existing knowledge structures. Given the complexity of conceptual structure, this can include adding links to additional domains (which are often activated by the source context), or failing to create links to certain domains which are part of the conceptual structure of the source language.

Thus, borrowing is an active and selective process on the part of the borrowing community. It has nothing to do with “linguistic laziness” as Jespersen (1905) speculated. Instead, semantic borrowing is a refinement of linguistic means, a filling in of perceived gaps in the available lexical material, and at times even a complete reshaping of the conceptual territory of the people of one culture under the influence of another culture.
There are many other areas in which loanwords and the borrowing process can conceivably give us insight into the organization of conceptual structure and its relation to the lexicalization process. Some of these aspects that we have not dealt with here are the following.

First, it appears that sometimes speakers of a borrowing language extract more general patterns from loanwords that they then use in the creation of so-called ‘false loanwords’ or ‘pseudo-loanwords.’ Examples are Japanese salaryman, walkman, etc., or Korean skinship ‘the habit of touching people while talking to them.’ This phenomenon is similar, but not identical to the phenomenon of loan morphology, which can be found on a large scale in English derivational suffixes which originated in French (e.g. -ery in words like bakery, eatery, etc.). Both phenomena can insightfully be treated in a usage-based model (cf. Rohde and Stefanowitsch 1999).

Second, there is the possibility that speakers of the borrowing language abstract general semantic schemas capturing what is common to sets of recognizable loanwords from a given language. On the phonological side, such schemas will include specification of certain loanword-specific phonological constraints or patterns. On the semantic side, it may include certain cultural stereotypes (maybe something like, ‘the French are sophisticated,’ cf. lingerie, café au lait, fin de siècle, or ‘the Germans are belligerent,’ cf. blitz, flak, strafe, zeppelin). (See Jespersen 1905 for discussion and exemplification.)

Third, the sense development of loanwords frequently involves reanalysis, folk etymology, and phonological reshaping on a large scale. The usage-based model predicts that loanwords will be especially susceptible to these processes because they provide a perfect locus for accelerated linguistic change: due to their initial lack of integration in the borrowing language, there are no constraints on changes triggered by existing network structure for the borrowed word. Native words, on the other hand, have a multitude of conceptual, lexical, morphological, and phonological connections with other units in the system, which will slow down semantic change.

In conclusion, we have shown that loanwords can tell us a lot more about the way language works than one might think, given their current peripheral position in linguistics. The usage-based model gives us the appropriate tool to study them, within a realistic model of language. Investigations of this kind allow us to study and model situations that are pervasive in everyday language (bilingualism; variation; transmission of innovations in a population; culture-historical change) which have been neglected by most theories of language. Exactly these areas create conceptual problems for modular and rule-based views of language; but many of the phenomena observed follow as direct consequences of a usage-based model of language.
References


