

On Chinese Loanwords in English

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Abstract—As a common phenomenon, languages borrow words from each other. The object of this paper is to study Chinese loanwords in English. It concentrates on the study of the history, source languages and transmission languages of Chinese loanwords in English and pays much attention to the approaches of borrowing. It also attempts to discuss the cultural influence of Chinese loanwords on English and to demonstrate that loaning is not only a linguistic but also a socio-linguistic phenomenon. In the hope that it can help English learners develop an interest and appreciation for English loanwords from Chinese and help them enlarge their vocabulary efficiently. It is also expected that foreigners can better understand Chinese culture by reading this paper.

Index Terms—loanword, source languages, transmission languages, means of borrowing, culture

Languages are rarely sufficient to themselves and “All languages borrow words from other languages” (Hatch, 2001, p170). English is quite open to borrow foreign words. Considering its short history of 1500 years, it is surprising that English has absorbed a great number of useful words and expressions of almost every language from all over the world. The English borrowings are not only from French, Latin, Greek and Scandinavian, but also from Indian, Chinese, Japanese and other languages. This paper attempts to analyze Chinese loanwords in English. It is mainly concerned with the history, source languages and transmission languages of Chinese loanwords in English as well as the means of borrowing. It also attempts to discuss the cultural influence of Chinese loanwords on English and to demonstrate that loaning is not only a linguistic but also a sociolinguistic phenomenon.

I. INTRODUCTION

Loaning, as a linguistic term, is defined as the transfer of language elements (forms, sounds, or even grammatical structures), usually in altered form and sometimes translated, in total or in part, from one language into another.

So a loanword or a borrowed word is a word taken over from another language and modified in phonemic shape, spelling, and paradigm of meaning according to the standards of the English language.

II. BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CHINESE LOAN WORDS IN ENGLISH

Words loaning as a historic-linguistic phenomenon has existed between Chinese and English for more than one thousand years. The earliest direct contact between China and Britain was dated back to 1637 when the British ship reached and dealt with tea. Previous to 1637, Chinese and British contact was mainly conducted through third countries, and Chinese language influence on English was limited. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, “silk” entered English in 888 via Latin and Greek, through the Silk Road. The entrance of china (porcelain) tells a similar story of indirect loaning. Comparing the loans silk and china with their models in Chinese (“si” and “ci”), we can find influential formal and phonological changes which make them more like English than Chinese.

Increasingly, Chinese loans found their way into English during the Ming Dynasty (1268- 1644). The loaning rate sped up during the Qing Dynasty (1644- 1911), and we can find many loans dated in this time in the Oxford English Dictionary, such as “ginseng” (1654), “bohea” (1711) and “Taoism” (1639). The Chinese loans such as “bohea” (1711) and “kaoline” (1727) indicate that trade was one carrier of Chinese loans. Cultural terms like “kowtow”, “Taoism”, “pailou” and governmental terms such as “yamen” and “taotai” were also introduced into English through direct contacts and translation. In the 20th century, as the world wars affected the lives of everyone, many words concerning politics, culture and business entered into English. The historical changes after 1949 in China influence on English with loans, such as “Great Leap Forward”, “Gang of Four”, “Four Modernizations”, “Maoism”, etc. Some of these loans are recorded in the dictionaries while some only appear in the mass media (Rongpei Wang, 2005, p71).

In general, all the Chinese words borrowed by the English language at different periods of time reflect the Chinese cultural and linguistic influences on the English language. They concern wide fields such as Chinese products, customs, economics, arts, politics and botany, etc.

III. SOURCE LANGUAGES OF CHINESE LOAN WORDS IN ENGLISH

Chinese dialects affect the Chinese - English loaning process. There are five major dialect groups within the language group of Chinese: Mandarin, Wu, Min, Yue, and Hakka.

Mandarin is the most widely spoken dialect of Chinese. It is based on the speech of Beijing and the northeast region of China. It is the official language for both mainland China (known as Putonghua) and Taiwan (known as Guoyu). It is also one of the four official languages of Singapore (known as Huayu).

Wu is spoken around the lower Yangzi River and its tributaries. Shanghainese is a well-known variety of Wu.

Min is commonly spoken with local variations by people in Taiwan, Fujian and Hainan. In English, these local variations are referred to as Fukkiandese, Kokkiannese, Amoy and Taiwanese. Amoy dialect is spoken in the city of Amoy (Xiamen). Historically, Xiamen has been an important center of international commerce. The city is located on an island in the mouth of the Jiulong River in Fujian Province near the Taiwan Straits.

Yue is primarily spoken in the province of Guangdong. Yue, including the well-known Cantonese (the language of Guangzhou, also known as Canton) is spoken in many parts of the Chinese diasporas, particularly Hong Kong and overseas Chinese settlements in the United States, Europe and South-east Asia. Cantonese, also called Guangdonghua or Guangdong dialect, is the primary language of the fertile Pearl River delta. Cantonese is spoken in China's Guangdong and Guangxi provinces, Hong Kong, Macao, and various overseas Chinese communities that contain large numbers of Cantonese-speaking immigrants and their descendants. For this reason, many of the English words borrowed from Chinese have their origins in Cantonese, such as kumquat from Cantonese (kumquat) and chop sue from Cantonese (tsap sui).

Hakka is the least well-known dialect group outside of China compared to the above four. Most of the Hakka dialect group is scattered throughout southeastern China in Guangxi province and throughout the Min and Yue regions.

Historically, the Hakka people were northerners who moved south during several waves of migration. Their name Hakka means "guest" indicating their immigrant status in the southern areas to which they moved.

The Chinese loans in English are mainly from three dialects (languages): Mandarin, Cantonese, and Amoy. They bring into English loans local colors and dialectal accents.

IV. TRANSMISSION LANGUAGES

A. *Japanese*

Among the transmitters of Chinese words into English, Japanese is the most active one and is responsible for directly transmitting many words. They include: daimio, ginkgo, judo, jujitsu, samisen, seppuku, Shinto, shogun, soy, tycoon, yen (currency), and Zen, etc.

Most of these items have been borrowed into English as if they were native Japanese words rather than Chinese loans because in the process of having been borrowed into Japanese, these words have been culturally and linguistically nativized as Japanese before they were borrowed into English. The perception that Japanese-transmitted borrowings are native Japanese words has led to at least one instance of double borrowing from a single Chinese etymon.

Japanese-transmitted borrowing yen and Chinese yuan are derived from a single Chinese etymon—Mandarin yuan. The two borrowings, however, maintain the distinction of referring alternately to Japanese currency and Chinese currency respectively.

B. *French*

The second most active transmission language for Chinese loanwords is French. The words bonze, galingale, kaolin, nankeen, Peke, Pekin, and Peking are transmitted by French.

Three of the loans, Peke, Pekin, and Peking, are derived from a single Chinese etymon, the name of the city Beijing. These three words and nankeen are considered Mandarin borrowings, but their spelling may have been influenced by another Chinese dialect. And French transmission of Chinese loanwords using the [j] phoneme typically changes the pronunciation to [k].

The transmission of Chinese loanwords through Indo-European languages can be very complex, and the transmission usually obscures the word's origin. The French loan bonze demonstrates some of these complexities. The French word was borrowed from Portuguese, which had borrowed the word from Japanese. Consequently, the original Mandarin source of the borrowing, fanseng, is virtually unrecognizable in English borrowing.

C. *Pidgin English*

As a variety of English, Pidgin English is a product of foreign trade of China. It has played an important role in the fields of foreign relations, foreign trade and cultural exchanges. A pidgin is not an actual language of native English speakers. A pidgin language occurs in a contact situation when one of the languages, typically that of the culturally or socioeconomically dominant group (the supersaturate language), undergoes radical simplification and is adopted as a language of wider communication by speakers of languages in a subordinate position (the substrate languages). For some reasons, full models of the supersaturate language are withheld from the substrate speakers, so that they are unable to learn the true language, and the pidgin language develops instead. (Foley, 2001, p392) Contact between the English and Chinese languages dates from the establishment of a British trading post in 1640 in Guangzhou, where Pidgin English developed in the 18th century. This was a trade jargon of the ports, now known technically as Chinese

Pidgin English and China Coast Pidgin, which helped the loaning process.

Pidgin spread when the Treaty Ports were established in China in 1843, but declined towards the end of the 19th century as Standard English began to be systematically taught in schools and universities. It is now extinct in China.

Some pidgin words entered English and have been in wide use in the English speaking countries. Two loanwords, chop- chop and chopstick are transmitted through Chinese Pidgin English. The Oxford English Dictionary suggests that chopstick is derived from the Pidgin form chop chop. This derivation might result from mistaking the Chinese word for chopstick, Mandarin kuaizi or kuai, with the homonym kuai (quickly). Because the Chinese word for chopstick is identical in pronunciation to Mandarin kuai (quick) and the two words are etymologically related (the word for chopstick —筷, is formed by adding a “bamboo radical “on top of the word for “quick”—快), the Oxford English Dictionary suggests that speakers who had a limited understanding of written Chinese substituted the Pidgin word chop as a mistranslation of the Chinese word for “chopstick”, kuai.

V. MEANS OF BORROWING

The means by which Chinese loanwords find their way into English are: transliteration, loan translation and loanblend.

A. Transliteration

Transliteration is a word which is changed into corresponding character of another alphabet or language. Transliterated loan words for the most part are proper Chinese nouns such as pinyin, renminbi, and are used almost the same as in Chinese, except for the tones. There are many words of this kind, for example, fengshui, taichi, feng huang, cha, guanxi, etc. These words have been entirely adopted with almost no change. And in principle; they are spelt and pronounced according to Mandarin Chinese with the exception of some words borrowed from other dialects such as Cantonese. Those words from other dialects are pronounced according to the Wade system, for example, bok choy, typhoon, chikung, wok, etc.

B. Loan Translation

Loan translation is a special type of borrowing, in which “each morpheme or word is translated in the equivalent morpheme or word in another language” (Hu, 2001, p102).

This is also called calque, which may be a word, a phrase, or even a short sentence. For this kind of loan to English, there are: spring rolls, bean curd, dragon boat, Chinese herbal medicine, Red Guards, running dog, the Great Leap Forward, yellow jacket, moon cake, bean curd, gold fish, Long march, Paper Tiger, the cultural revolution, etc.

C. Loanblend

Loanblending is a process in which part of the form is native and part is borrowed, but the meaning is fully native. The first part of the word Chinatown is from Chinese, but the second part is of the English origin. Many transliterations and loan translations have penetrated into English for a long time and somewhat naturalized, and these words have the ability to build new words with other element, just like the example above. Another words belonging to this kind are: Maoism, Peking duck, Lantian man, Sino-Japanese, Sinologist, etc.

VI. CULTURE REFLECTED BY CHINESE LOANWORDS IN ENGLISH

Language does not exist apart from culture. Culture may be defined as what a society does and thinks while language is a particular how of thought. Each society has a culture of its own and each society has its particular practices, beliefs, and life style. Edward Sapir argues: The necessities of intercourse bring the speakers of one language into direct or indirect contact with those of neighboring or culturally dominant languages. The intercourse may be friendly or hostile. It may move on the humdrum plane of business and trade relations or it may consist of a borrowing or interchange of spiritual goods —art, science, religion.

It would be difficult to point to a completely isolated language dialect. (159) loaning is inevitable indeed for the inevitability of language contacts and lexical insufficiency of almost every language. It is true of English which has benefited from loaning by adopting 600, 000 foreign words. Economic development, aided by science and technology, makes the language open for more loaning. Therefore, it resorts to loaning frequently, not only from closely related Germanic languages, but also from language far in kin, like Chinese.

It is a pity that China practiced a closed- door policy for years, affecting Chinese- English loaning. But fortunately, China has never remained totally closed. Therefore, Chinese has not only borrowed from, but also loaned many language items to English.

The long history of Chinese loan words is not only the process of contacting between Chinese and English, but also the process of the comprehension of Chinese culture by the west. The loanwords reflect all aspects of Chinese culture: (1) Society and Politics: Brainwashing, Boxer Rebellion, Long march, Hundred Flowers, The Great Leap Forward, Paper Tiger, The cultural revolution, etc. (2) Philosophy, value and religion: Ren, Li, Doctrine of the Mean (called Zhong Yong), lose face, give face, Taoism, etc. (3) Food, drink and clothing: silk, finseng, chop suey, spring roll, Mao tai, kaolin, wonton, etc. (4) Animals: running dog, dragon robes, dragon throne, dragon’s eyes, etc.

VII. CONCLUSION

Loaning is a very important linguistic and socio- linguistic phenomenon in the English language. Owing to the rapid development of modern mass media and internationally cultural exchange, a great number of loan words from Chinese have come into English to satisfy the needs of society. Words related to Chinese cultures have found their way into English and have also shown a new China worldwide. Based on the discussion above, the following conclusion can be drawn:

- (1) The Chinese loanwords have a long history.
- (2) The Chinese loans are mainly from Mandarin, Cantonese and Amoy.
- (3) The four transmission language of Chinese loans is Japanese, French, Dutch and Pidgin English.
- (4) The means by which Chinese loanwords find their way into English are transliteration, loan translation and loanblend.
- (5) Chinese loanwords in English reflect Chinese culture and make westerners come to comprehend Chinese culture.

With the development of international exchange, language contact has become not only inevitable, but also more frequent. As mentioned at the beginning, English has become an international language. The wider the range of its use, the more it absorbs foreign words. China, a country with thousands of years' history and culture is becoming more and more powerful with her reform and opening up policy. In the future, there will certainly be a flood of Chinese words into English.

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