A Literature Review of Loanwords in English

——With a Focus on Types of Lexical Borrowings and the Process of Borrowing

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Abstract: Loanwords account for 80% percent of English vocabulary, which are necessary in the process of English learning. This article reviews five aspects of loanwords in English. The historical background of English loanwords is divided into four stages, which are Romano—Celtic Period, Old English, Middle English and Modern English respectively. I review the historical, social, cultural reasons of borrowing. Two ways of classification are reviewed: the linguistic-based classification (Haugen) and the product-based classification (Zhang). In terms of the borrowing process, asymmetry, complexity, flexibility and creativity are four notable characteristics. The benefits of learning English loanwords involve three aspects, which are related to teachers, students and translation.

1. Introduction

To better the understanding of English loanwords in English language, this article reviews different aspects in loanwords. Words in a certain language borrowed from other languages are called loanwords [1]. The controversy over the types of lexical borrowings is considerable, for scholars categorize loanwords from different views. In addition, according to China National Knowledge Infrastructure, recent studies are mainly focus on vocabulary teaching and little attention is paid to the teaching of English loanwords. Modern English words are comprised of 29% French,29% Latin,26% German,6% Greek as well as 6% others [2], of which nearly 80% of English words are loanwords [3]; hence knowing English loanwords is necessary for English learners.

Although loanwords enrich the English vocabulary, they increase the difficulty of English vocabulary learning [4]. Due to rich loanwords in English, beginning learners may be puzzled by irregularity of English pronunciation and spelling. Unlike other Germanic languages which can be read by mastering their alphabets, English learners have to learn phonetic symbols before learning English vocabulary because there is no one-to-one mapping between a sound and a letter, which is partially because of loanwords [5]. Therefore, studying loanwords is beneficial to vocabulary learning.

The structure of this paper is as follows. In section 2, I review the historical background of English

loanwords. In section 3, I present the historical reasons, social reasons, cultural reasons and psychological reasons respectively. In section 4, I introduce three classification of lexical borrowings. Then, I explain the characteristics of the borrowing process. Section 6 is the benefits of learning English loanwords.

2. Historical Background

Table 1: The historical background of English vocabulary.

Romano—Celtic Period (50 B. C.—A. D. 410)	
55 - 54 B. C.	Romans were the first invaders, who had the higher civilization compared with Celts. Celtic absorbed many words which denoted concrete things of daily life from Romans. For instance: *cherry* (Latin. cerasum), *pear* (Latin. pirum), *plum* (Latin. prunus), *pepper* (Latin. piper), *wine* (Latin. vinum) [3].
Old English (A. D. 450—A. D. 1066)	
5th century A. D.	Several Germanic tribes called Angles, Saxons, Frisians and Jutes came to British Isles to help Celts defend their lands. Nonetheless, friends became conquerors. The Anglo-Saxon language dominated Celtic [6].
6th century A. D.	During this period, Latin words were borrowed into English because of the Christianization of England. English also borrowed education terms from Latin because the first schools were held by churches [3].
1066	Norman Conquest was an important event, after which both English and French were spoken by people of different identities. People speaking English were hailed as inferior people, whereas powerful and well-educated people spoke French [6].
Middle English (A. D. 1066—A. D. 1500)	
14th century	With the beginning of Renaissance, reading ancient Greek and Latin literature gained popularity in Europe. Scholars and writers used Greek or Latin for literary creation. The major contribution of Greek and Latin lies in roots and affixes instead of words [6].
Modern English (A. D. 1500—present)	
late 17th and early 18th centuries	After the restoration of Stuart Dynasty, French had become popular again as a fashionable language [4]. A large proportion of French words in Modern English vocabulary retained their previous pronunciation and spelling [7].

The development of English vocabulary can be traced back to 2000 years ago. In this section, I brie-

fly review the historical background of English vocabulary.

3. The Reasons for Borrowing

English loanwords are inseparable from cultural, economic, political elements. This section mentions reasons for borrowing that are identified in the literature.

3.1. Historical Reasons

The borrowing process is accelerated by historical events and political circumstances, for different nations establish connection on social and lingual aspects. Loanwords pass into English vocabulary via wars, invasions, conquests [3]. For example, a large number of French words poured into English vocabulary due to the Norman Conquest in 1066, of which most denoted religion, military, government, administration, legal, culture and royal court. At least 75% of these French words are still used today [6].

In addition, most of Indo-European languages are phonetic languages, including English. The phoneme writing system was formed in the 8th century, and its Latin alphabet is adopted by 120 languages in the world including English, Latin, French, German, which are inflected languages.
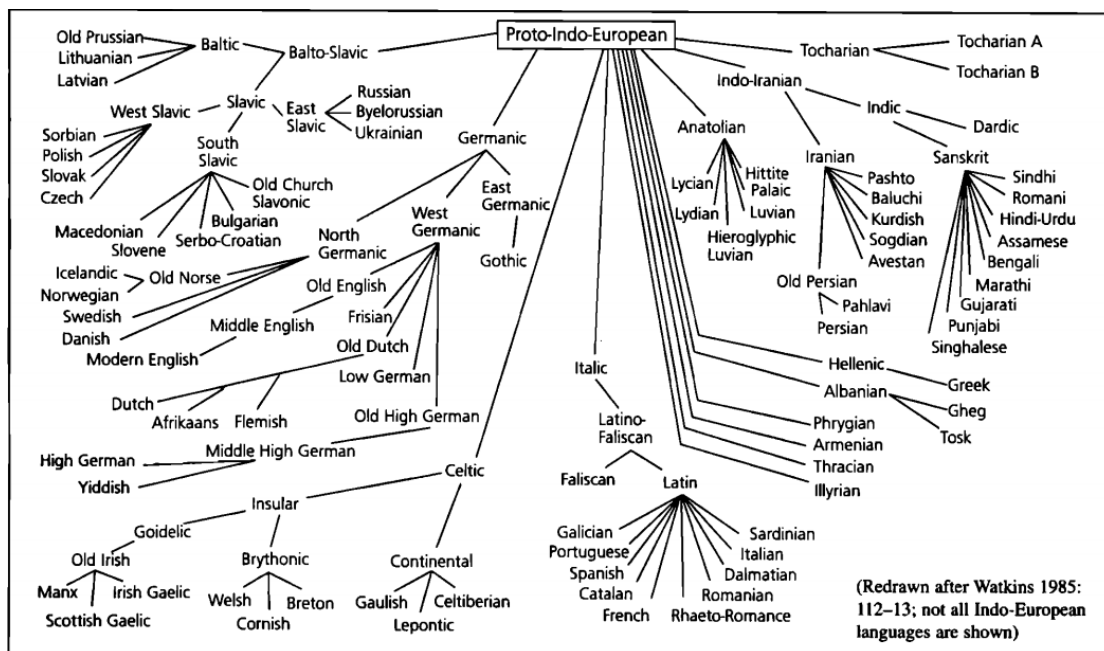

Figure 1: The Indo-European family tree [8].

The Indo-European family tree in Figure 1 demonstrates the relationship among languages deriving from the common Proto-Indo-European parent language, which is a highly inflected language [6]. English and German both derive from Germanic family; French is derived from Latin, which belongs to Italic family [9]. Therefore, these languages are easy to have contact and borrow words from each other.

3.2. Social Reasons

A country tends to absorb an advanced culture and thereupon absorb words if it is in a more economically and politically weak situation [9]. Additionally, due to the rapid development of science and technology as well as the frequent exchange and communication among countries in 20th Century, a large number of foreign words have entered English and become an integral part of English vocabulary to meet social needs. For example, loanwords with Chinese origin came into English via modern international communication, particularly after China opened its door to the outside world in the 1970s [2]. These words include:

    (1) *wénhuà dàgémìng* "cultural revolution"
    (2) *jìhuà shāngpǐn jīngjì* "planned commodity economy"
    (3) *tiě fànwǎn* "iron rice bowl"
    (4) *xiāngzhèn qǐyè* "township enterprises"
    (5) *càilánzǐ gōngchéng* "vegetable basket project" [2].

3.3. Cultural Reasons

The vacancy of vocabulary often occurs in the process of communication because differences exist in cultural customs and living environments [10]. Therefore, one language borrows a word from another language to fill the lexical vacancy [3]. For example, English words *taichi* and *kungfu* are borrowed from Chinese culture; *sumo* and *judo* are from Japanese culture. Lacking appropriate words to match such notions that do not exist in English culture, English vocabulary absorbs foreign words to fill the lexical vacancy [10].

    Another reason is poetry creation needs. Many English poets employ different words representing the same concept to express emotive features [11]. For instance, Latin *cordial* was added to native *friendly*, *admire* to *like*, French *desire* to *wish*, *admire* to *love* [3]. Such words enrich synonyms and present the expressive resources of the vocabulary.

3.4. Psychological Reasons

The abundance of loanwords implies the openness, inclusiveness of English people [12]. Loanwords are increasing because English people are willing to accept them [12]. By contrast, French people object to borrow too many words from other languages [13]. For instance, the French government forced the use of French in all public documents, labor contracts, and agreements, and cleared English loanwords from advertisements posted on all highways [13]. Therefore, the exclusion of foreign language has become an important measure of the French government to protect its own national language. Moreover, *Dictionnaire des termes officiels de la langue française (Dictionary of official terms of the French language)* published in 1994 included 3500 new words and loanwords. The main purpose of this dictionary is to reduce the interference of loanwords on common words, and protect the purity of the French language [13]. For example, *fast food* is replaced by *restauration rapide.*

4. Types of lexical borrowings

Since nineteenth century, scholars have paid much attention to the classification of lexical borrowings. Paul [14] and Seiler [15] categorized lexical borrowings, and later, the classification proposed by Betz [16] formed the basis of current classifications, which is the distinction between *Lehnwort* 'loanword' and *Lehnprägung* 'loan coinage' (as cited by Winford [17]). Focusing on different perspectives, scholars categorize lexical borrowings in different ways. In this section, I briefly review

three methods of classifying lexical borrowings.

4.1. Classification Based on Morphemic and Phonemic Substitutions

Haugen [18] [19] divides the loanwords into three broad categories based on the relationship between morphemic and phonemic substitution, which are *loanwords*, *loan meanings*, and *creations*. *Loanwords* refer to lexis imitating the phonological shape as well as meaning in the source language, and also involve pure loanwords, e.g., Spanish *burrito* [17].

Loan meanings include semantic changes of a recipient language word influenced by a source language [17]. For example, *gift* once meant "bride price", its new meaning "something acquired without compensation" was influenced by Old Norse *gipt* or *gift*.

Creations mean that foreign concept is expressed by innovatively using native elements [17] (e. g. English phrase *black humour* from French *humour noir*).

The unique feature of Haugen's classification is the focus on the linguistic processes. The terms 'importation' and 'substitution' are two important notions in Haugen's analysis. The adoption of a foreign form or meaning is called *importation*, whereas *substitution* is defined as the process of substituting sounds and morphemes in recipient language for those in source language [17]. Nonetheless, this kind of classification is broad, and it is complex for people without any linguistic background to understand.

Durkin [1] sorts the lexical borrowings into four types based on Haugen's classification, which are *loanwords*, *loan translations*, *semantic loans* and *loan blends*. *Loanwords* involve the word forms, meaning as well as a part of meaning borrowed from the donor languages [1]. Often the sound of donor languages is changed to adapt to the recipient language systems. For example, English *phase* /feiz/ is borrowed from French *phase* /faz/.

Loan translations refer to words or expressions borrowed from donor languages by using similar forms in recipient languages [1], e.g. English *mother tongue* is adopted from Latin expression *lingua maternal* [6].

Words with extended meaning due to the influence of partially similar words in donor languages are called *semantic loans* [1]. According to Durkin [1], some of these words are related, e.g. French word *plombier* and English word *plumber,* whereas some have similar forms without much relation; for instance, English word *manage* and French word *ménager* . Another case is that words show neither resemblance in form nor relation [1]. Such words include English *manner,* whose original meaning was how something is done or how it happens, obtained new meaning "a way of acting or behaving" under the influence of Latin word *modus* [1].

Loan blends denote the words substituting native morphs in recipient languages for morphs in complex words, e.g. *neurotize* (E[1]) replaces *-ize* for *-iser* in *neurotiser* (F) [1].

Loanwords, *loan translations*, *semantic loans* are three types which present that one language has an influence on another language's lexis and provide a good way for identifying lexical borrowings. However, the dividing line between loanwords and semantic loans is unclear, which leads to the emergence of an intermediate category "loan blends" [1]. Moreover, as for both loan translations and semantic loans, differentiating semantic borrowing from the coincidental development of new meaning is difficult [1]. For instance, the English word *hell* was influenced by Christian culture and Greek afterlife. However, the word *hell* is in correspondence with almost two different and semantically non-overlapping Latin word *īnferna* and Greek word *Hades* in terms of lexical terms.

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[1] Here F means French, G: Greek, L: Latin, E: English and CH: Chinese.

4.2 Classification based on the Assimilation and Manner of Borrowing

As for an overview of different approaches, Zhang [6] groups the loanwords into four types by virtue of the degree of assimilation and manner of borrowing, namely *aliens*, *denizens*, *translation loans* and *semantic-loans*. *Aliens* are loanwords whose original pronunciation and spelling remain unchanged [6]. Therefore, this kind of words is easy to identify. For example:

    (1) French: *décor   massage*

    (2) Greek: *gymnasium   arithmetic*

    (3) Latin: *id est   et cetera*

    The words borrowed in the early times and then were well anglicized are called *denizens* [6]. Their pronunciation and spelling have changed greatly to conform to English [6]. Therefore, it is hard for us to recognize these words as loanwords today. For example, *pork* from *porc* (F), *cup* from *cuppa* (L).

    Words and expressions transmitting from other languages using English elements are *translation loans*, which can be further categorized into two classes based on their translation manner [6]. One is sound-based translation, and the other is meaning-based translation.

    (1) Sound-based translation: *tofu* from *dòufu* (CH)

    (2) Meaning-based translation: *long time no see* from *hǎojiǔbùjiàn* (CH)

    In addition, *semantic-loans* denote the borrowing of meaning instead of form. Specifically, English words obtain a new meaning from other languages [6]. The word *dream* did not mean a cherished desire before borrowing the present meaning from Scandinavian; it meant *toy* and *music* originally.

    Zhang's classification describes the results instead of the borrowing process. The terms 'loan translation' or 'semantic loan' have no relation to the borrowing process, which are only tags employed by different writers to demonstrate the observed borrowing results [18]. However, borrowing is a process rather than a state [18]. On the other hand, this classification is simple and highly acceptable by people. The types used in this classification well present the characteristics of each category, which help students understand them easily. For example, *alien* refers to someone coming from a foreign country. If students know the meaning of this word, they are able to infer what aliens denote in this classification.

5.   Characteristics of the Borrowing Process

The process of borrowing takes time and involves many steps, showing distinctive characteristics. This section discusses four main characteristics of the borrowing process.

5.1. Asymmetry

Kemmer [20] notes that both of the languages that come into contact borrow words from each other. However, most of the time, the language community lending words to the borrowing language community has a superior culture or stronger economy and politics [20]; hence the borrowing process is not equal. For example, in ancient times, Roman Empire was powerful and had a more advanced culture than that of Germanic groups. Therefore, loanwords with Latin origin, such as *dish*, *cup* and *kettle* which did not exist in English vocabulary, came into English in the first few centuries A. D. because of the trade with Roman [20]. "Few Germanic words, on the other hand, passed into Latin." Kemmer noted [20].

5.2. Complexity

The evolution of a loanword is complex and involves several stages. At the first stage, a new word sounds unfamiliar to native people, such word can be called a foreign word [20]. For example, *bon vivant* (F), *mutatis mutandis* (L) and *Schadenfreude* (G) [20].

Then, as the word becomes conventionalized, people with little or even no knowledge of the source language can understand the new word; at this point this word is defined as a borrowing (e. g. *change* from French *changier*). However, foreign words fail to become loanwords if people do not use them widely. Moreover, the process is completed when the words are not conceived as loanwords by the borrowing community [20]. For example, people can hardly recognize that words such as *they, want, husband, sister* come from Scandinavian.

5.3. Creativity

English loanwords create new loanwords by substituting native roots or affixes for original loanwords or combining Latin and Greek affixes [2]. This is one of the reasons why English has an extensive vocabulary. For example:

    (1) *pacifist* (root: *pacif* (L) + suffix: *-ist* (G))
    (2) *speedometer* (root: *speed* (E) + G: suffix: *-ometer* (G))
    (3) *television* (root: *televi* (G) + suffix: *-sion* (L))
    (4) *automobile* (affix: *auto* (G) + root: *-mobile* (L))
    (5) *sociology* (root: *soci* (L) + suffix: *-ology* (G))

5.4. Flexibility

As discussed above, English absorbs loanwords by means of zero substitution, substitution, and partial substitution, making the process of formation flexible [2]. For instance, *tsunami* in Japanese, *fengshui* in Chinese are borrowed directly without any substitution. Other loanwords such as *tofu* in Chinese, *message* in French have changes in either spelling or pronunciation [2]. The word *tofu* is derived from Chinese *dòufu,* which has changed in both spelling and pronunciation. The pronunciation of message in French is /mɛsa/, whereas in English is /ˈmɛsɪdʒ/.

6.   Benefits of learning English loanwords

Learning English loanwords benefits different groups of people. The following section illustrates the benefits of learning English loanwords for teachers, students as well as translators.

As for teachers, learning borrowed words helps teach English vocabulary and lighten students' burden of memory. Vocabulary is a crucial part of language learning, without which one cannot master a language. However, most of teachers only use some mechanical ways to teach English vocabulary, making students frustrated [21]. Therefore, to lay a solid foundation for further English learning, a motivating way to teach new words is needed. Knowing loanwords help teachers sort out different types of words, affixes, and roots based on their origins, and teach English vocabulary more effectively by introducing historical background and formation of loanwords. In this way, students are motivated to learn English vocabulary through fun stories instead of rote learning and the burden of memory is also lightened [22]. After learning the origins and meanings of these words, affixes and roots, students can infer new meanings when these elements are combined randomly [23]. For instance, when teaching students "maltreat'', teachers can first teach students the prefix "mal'', which means badly and bad, then students can infer the meaning of the word "maltreat''. For students,

learning loanwords helps them broaden the way of thinking. Knowing a new language enables them to have a different way of thinking. Students experience different ways of thinking about the world if knowing the word-formation in different languages.

Moreover, translation relies on one's knowledge of loanwords. The biggest challenge for China's translation is the shortage of qualified translators, particularly, those who can undertake the task of expanding cultural exchanges with other countries [24]. To become a qualified translator, one needs to have a strong foundation of both source language and target language [25]. Due to rich synonyms which are endowed with different stylistic meaning, emotive meaning, collocations or distribution in sentences, there are different words to express the same semantic meaning. If synonyms are misused, the change of connotation tends to perplex people. For example, *time*, *age* and *epoch* all mean an occasion for some event; *time* is a native word; *age* is a French word, which is more formal, and *epoch* is a Latin word, which is for technical writing as well as officialese. Therefore, the choice of words is important, and the knowledge of loanwords enables accurate translation [26].

7. Conclusion

As stated in Encyclopedia Americana, "The English language has vast debts. In any dictionary some 80% of the entries are borrowed" [27]. This article has reviewed English loanwords from historical view, borrowing reasons, borrowing types, borrowing process, and benefits of loanwords. The emergence of English loanwords started from thousands of years ago along with wars, trade, culture and other factors. This article has reviewed different characteristics in the borrowing process such as asymmetry, complexity, flexibility as well as creativity. In addition, the classification of loanwords has been debated in the literature with no consensus. The most acceptable method is the classification based on the assimilation and manner of borrowing.

Learning English loanwords is beneficial because English vocabulary is an indispensable part in the process of learning English, during which loanwords can be used as helpful tools. As the society advances, there is a tendency that an increasing number of foreign words will continue to march into English vocabulary. The various aspects of English loanwords reviewed above provide a better understanding of loanwords.

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