Abiodun O. Sofunke

STRUCTURAL BORROWING: A CASE STUDY OF THE INFLUENCE OF FRENCH ON GERMAN

1. Introduction

Natural languages are constantly in a state of flux. The factors which motivate innovations in a language can, in broad terms, be classified as language internal and language external factors. The latter can furthermore be subdivided into those internal to a particular language community and those external to it. The tendency toward greater structural simplification of a language is an example of language internal factors. Language external factors, which are internal to a particular language community, emanate from the role of a language as a means of communication within the society. Languages change in the course of the interaction between social classes and in the course of the transmission of the language system from generation to generation. Changes brought about by factors external to the language community are rooted in historico-geographical factors. Some of such factors, as pointed out by Chen (1972) are invasions, wars, migration, commercial traffic, intermarriage, proximity, bilingualism and borrowing. Borrowing from one language to another more readily takes place with lexical items than with the structure. An explanation for this fact can be found in Suchsland's (et al) (1976:610) suggestion that the semantic component of the language system and the lexicon are most closely linked with the development of society:

> "Am unmittelbarsten sind die semantische Komponente des Sprachsystems und das Lexikon mit der Gesellschaftsentwicklung verbunden. Die materielle und geistige Entwicklung der Gesellschaft manifestiert sich in neuen Bewußtseinsinhalten und -strukturen, für die neue Bezeichnungen gebildet oder schon vorhandene Wörter in neuer Bedeutung verwendet werden."

However, in spite of this assertion, Suchsland and others do not share the view, referred to by Comrie (1981:196) as a 'widespread myth', that certain basic aspects of the structure of a language are unchangeable:

> "Denn Sprachwandel zeigt sich zweifellos in vielfältigen Erscheinungsformen: als Lautwandel, als Bedeutungswandel, ABER AUCH ALS WANDEL DER MORPHOLOGIE UND DER SYNTAX" (My emphasis AOS) (Suchsland 1976:603)

The main purpose of this paper is to show that borrowing from one language by another can equally be effected on the structure of the language. Our emphasis will be on the relationship between French and German from the period immediately after the Middle Ages up to the period of the Enlightenment in the 18th century. The presentation is divided into three main parts. The first deals with the theoretical issues involved in the process of borrowing, while the second part deals with historical und political issues. In the third part we will present data which demonstrate structural borrowing.

2. Theoretical Basis of Borrowing

In this section we will discuss the process through which borrowing takes place. The question will be put as to whether the process of borrowing can be considered as a mechanical process. The preconditions for borrowing will be discussed.

2.1. Process of Borrowing

Johann Schmidt's wave theory (Wellentheorie) represents the standard account of the process by which one language is influenced by another. Schmidt's (1872) theory arose as a reaction to Schleicher's (1861) tree method of establishing genetic affinity of languages or dialects (Stammbaumtheorie). Schleicher's tree theory essentially has the implication that there can be no innovation common to two language groups once they have branched away from each other within the family tree. It claims that no innovation can cross the geographical line of demarcation which came about as a result of a previous innovation having applied to just a part of the language group.

The main thrust of the wave theory is to show that the claim implicit in the tree theory is not correct. The wave theory points out that, even after the emergence of the putative geographical line of demarcation, there are linguistic innovations which affect either the whole language group or just a part of it. If the innovation affects just a part of the language groups, the new boundary thus created will not necessarily coincide with the previous geographical line of demarcation. This implies that linguistic innovations can move both within and across language groups.

Johannes Schmidt's wave theory is based on the conception that there is, between the two extremes of a language group, a con-

tinuum of varying languages. Innovations occur in these languages as a result of one of the languages gaining political, religious or social might over the others. The influence from this language, being the reference point, spreads as waves to other languages. As it is the case with waves, this influence diminishes with increasing distance. Thus the influence on languages which are geographically close to the point of reference will be much stronger than on those which are relatively distant.

The wave theory, though more plausible than Schleicher's familiy tree theory requires some modifications. The theory is mechanistic to the extent that it is exclusively based on external factors while completely leaving out the first two factors mentioned in our introduction. The theory takes cognizance neither of language internal factors nor of factors within a particular language community. Suchsland (p.609) describes this one-sided view of language change as a vulgar materialistic view of language change in contradistinction of the equally objectionable view based solely on language internal factors.

In a similar vein, Höfler (1955) points out that it will be wrong to see language change only in terms of the influence of one language over another. He modifies the wave theory by setting up what he calls dimensions of causality, i.e. horizontal and vertical dimensions of causality. The horizontal dimension represents the actual process by which a language comes under external influence or by which the imitation of the features of another language takes place. The spontaneity, productivity and creativity on the part of the society adopting the features of a foreign language represents the vertical dimension of causality: Höfler argues that a mechanical conception of historical occurrence will be the result of neglecting the vertical dimension. It would amount to dealing exclusively with the products of culture while utterly neglecting the producers of culture:

> "Die notwendige Folge des Außerachtlassens dieser "vertikalen" Kräfte ist ein Rechnen nur mit Kulturprodukten, nicht aber Kulturproduzenten und -reproduzenten und den in ihnen wirkenden Produktivitätskräften."

However, we feel Höfler overstretches the question of the 'vertical dimension of causality' by making borrowing dependent on the preparedness of a language community to adopt the features of a foreign language:

"Wo keine Aufnahmebereitschaft und -möglichkeit besteht, dort gibt es auch keine Beeinflussung und keine fruchtbare Aufnahme zu dauernder Gestaltung."

Much as we agree with the principles behind his 'vertical dimension of causality', we are of the opinion that the tendency for a language to be influenced by another does not depend on the preparedness of that language community to adopt features of the foreign language. The vertical dimension is relevant only with regard to how the language community manipulates the features of the foreign language. As we will point out in the next subsection, the possibility of a language being influenced by another depends not so much on the wishes of the speakers of a language but on the balance of social forces between the societies concerned.

2.2. Preconditions for Borrowing

Borrowing from one language by another presupposes contact between the two languages. Language contact can be expressed in cultural, political, social, economic or religious forms or through a combination of all these factors. There are three basic preconditions for borrowing. Given the basis through which contact is established between two languages, one language community must see in the other, from which it is borrowing, an exemplary image of perfection. Time factor and communication between the two language communities are equally important. All these three conditions must be met before borrowing can take place. Contact between two languages must extend over a period of time for borrowing to take place and for the borrowed features to be integrated into the system of the borrowing language. The role of bilinguals make communication between the two language communities possible. Usually the exalted status of the foreign language is reflected in the high social status of the bilinguals. Since the higher social status of the foreign language is determind by objective conditions, such as historical and socio-economic factors, there can be no question of borrowing being dependent on the preparedness on the part of the speakers of the subordinate language to adopt the features of the foreign language. If the foreign language retains its dominant position for considerable a period of time, borrowing is bound to take place, although the borrowing will not necessarily permeate the entire language community.

2.3. Types of Borrowing

The extent to which the borrowed features of a foreign language permeate the society depends on how widespread the influence of the language is, or how much contact is has with the generality of the speakers of the subordinate language. Borrowing may be restricted to particular social classes or groups. It may reflect itself solely in the written form of a language, while it may sometimes be a feature of a particular geographical area. Ebert (1978:17) draws attention to the fact that borrowing can be either qualitative or quantitative. Borrowing is qualitative when a language adopts a new feature from a foreign language. Quantitative borrowing results when a language increases the use of an already existing feature under the influence of a foreign language.

In the following section we shall discuss the historical and political factors which motivated the influence of French on the German language.

3. Historical and Political Factors

The historical epoch in Europe from the end of the Middle Ages to the French Revolution of 1789 was characterized by a trend towards the decline of the feudal order, the development of industrial capitalism and with it the rise of the power of the middle class. A number of historical and political factors contributed in bringing about a situation in which the development of Germany, in political, economic and cultural aspects, lagged behind that of other nations in central and western Europe. The main points to be noted are the fragmentation of the German nation, reformation, the Peasants' War and the Thirty Years War.

While in other countries of central and western Europe, the conflict between the central authority and the local feudal princes facilitated the emergence of a centralized and powerful monarchy, Germany remained a fragmented nation. The bitter conflicts within the aristocracy, which facilitated the emergence of powerful monarchies in other countries of Europe did not take place in Germany. On the contrary, the Habsburg dynasty, the seat of the German empire, pursued expansionist policies in foreign territories. This created room for the feudal princes at home to extend and strengthen their power base. This position of things considerably weakened Germany with the effect that the fragmented nation was not in a

position to give effective resistance to the ever increasing exploitative demands of the Roman Catholic Church in Rome. Rome was the seat of the feudal system.

The significance of Martin Luther's reformation lies in the fact that it galvanized popular opposition against the excesses of the Roman Catholic Church. Luther had criticized the Roman Catholic concept by which forgiveness of sins could be obtained through good works. He argued that forgiveness of sins could only come through the Grace of God. In subsequent writings he called, among other things, for the independence of the German nation and the German empire from papal domination, putting the control of the properties of the Church in the hands of secular authorities and for the establishment of an independent Church organization.

Luther's attack on the Roman Catholic Church gave impetus to the struggle of the peasants against the oppressive feudal lords. While the struggle of the peasants against feudal oppression had previously been sporadic and unco-ordinated, it found a rallying point in Luther's theses. Luther's attack on the Roman Catholic Church and the clerical feudal elements was converted to a rejection of the feudal order in general. The intensified anti feudal agitations of this period culminated in the Peasants' War of 1524 to 1526. The feudal forces emerged victorious and the peasants were badly decimated.

The outcome of the Peasants' War had important political and economic consequences for subsequent developments in Germany. Politically, it meant the strengthening of the local feudal princes thereby intensifying the weakness of the central authority. Moreover it made it possible for the sectional princes to form alliances with foreign powers who perceived their national interests in terms of the continued fragmentation of Germany. It also meant getting Germany deeply involved in the Thirty Years War, which subsequently broke out. The military victory of the feudal forces meant, in economic terms, the continuation of the form of production based on the exploitation of the peasants. This form of production, however, stagnated given the fact that most of the peasants were decimated in the bloody terror unleashed by the feudal forces. Uneven economic development of the various parts of Germany was another consequence of the military victory of the princes, since the latter were not all on the same level of economic development. This situation militated against the development of

large centralized markets which are characteristic of capitalist production relations. The intensification of the influence of the feudal princes was not only devastating to the peasantry but also meant a set-back for the social, political and economic development of the middle class.

More devastating to the overall development of Germany was the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) which was largely fought on German soil. This protracted war was fought on a combination of political and religious grounds, one camp representing Spanish, Habsburg and catholic interests while the other represented antispanish and anticatholic interests. While the war brought about serious devastation and ruin on German territory, it afforded France and Sweden, the two beneficiaries of the war, the opportunity to extend their spheres of influence in central and western Europe. The peace treaty signed at Westphalia gave official sanction to the independance of the local feudal princes, while France and Sweden got the right to vote in the Reichstag. With the peace treaty guaranteeing the right of the feudal princes to go into alliances with foreign powers, the princes became the effective representatives of Germany. This to all intents and purposes, meant a dissolution of the German empire.

The triumph of the industrial revolution in England (1642-1649) during the last years of the Thirty Years War created a new situation in Europe. It signaled, at a continental level, the decline of the feudal order and the rise of capitalism. The emergent English middle class became more capable of gaining the upper hand over their competitors on the seas. The decline of the feudal order brought about a situation in which absolutist feudal conditions almost exclusively dominated the continent of Europe. This situation made France, whose position had been strengthened by the Thirty Years War, the most influential feudal power in central and western Europe. The absolutist feudal power which emerged in Germany during this period lacked the kind of material base characteristic of more developed absolutist nations. It is thus not surprising that German absolutism saw in France a perfect manifestation of its aspirations. Given its limitations however, as remarked by Streisand (1980:49) it could only appear as an aberration of the perfect example:

> "Er trat als territorialstaatlicher Absolutismus auf, meist als bloße Karikatur des Vorbildes, wie es vor allem der französische Hof den deutschen Duodezfürsten bot."

The relatively early emergence of the absolutist monarch in France facilitated the development of culture which in turn made France a shining example to other European countries. This development of culture reflected itself in the elegance and luxury of the French court and in the advancement in Arts and science. The ferment of literary work gave universality to the French language. German writers such as Lessing, Schiller and Herder were influenced by the French Enlightenment movement of the 18th century. They were particularly influenced by Voltaire's perception of history. Voltaire, one of the representatives of French Enlightenment had propagated the ideal of history being a process of the progress of reason, enlightenment and insight.

Having established, in this section, the historical, political and cultural factors which placed France in an exemplary position with regard to Germany, we shall, in the next section deal with concrete examples which illustrate how the contact between the two nations are reflected in the German language.

4. Structural Influence

Among the examples to be considered are borrowings which are restricted to particular geographical locations and those occurring in literary texts. Others are the emergence of the indefinite article, post position of participles with respect to substantives and exclamatory sentences.

4.1. Geographically Restricted Borrowing

Ebert (1978) notes the occurrence of the following constructions in southwestern Germany.

es macht gut Wetter
lit.: it makes good weather
es hat viele Bäume im Wald
lit.: it has many trees in the forest

The constructions are formed in the pattern of French, as in the following.

il fait beau temps
il y a beaucoup d'arbres dans la forêt

Germany's border with France lies in the Southwest and this fact must have influenced the type of construction found in south-

western Germany.

4.2. Borrowing Reflected in Literary Texts

An example of borrowing which is reflected in literary texts is the use of the accusative in absolute form. The absolute use of a case occurs when a part of a sentence is formally detached from the sentence and used as an adjunct. Behagel (1932) as well as Dal (1966) note that the construction arose during the 18th century under French influence. They occurred in the works of Lessing, Goethe, Schiller among others. The following are some examples.

> eine Gruppe der schönsten Gestalten, den Pokal in der Hand (Lessing)
>
> einen kritischen Freund an der Seite, kommt man schneller vom Fleck (Goethe)

The constructions follow the pattern of the following French examples.

> elle le regarda, les armes aux yeux
> je dors, les fenêtres ouvertes

The use of the reflexive as passive following the pattern of French is another example of constructions found more in written texts than in speech form. The use of the reflexive as passive in French can be illustrated with verbs like

se trouver	-	to be found
s'appeler	-	to be called
s'étonner	-	to be surprised

The following are some German adaptations of the usage

> bei diesen Schriften findet sich ein Brief
> 'a letter can be found in these writings'
> das Pferd reitet sich gut
> 'the horse can (easily) be ridden'
> das Buch liest sich schwer
> 'the book can (only) be read with difficulty'

4.3. Indefinite Article

In the use of the indefinite article we see an example of quantitative borrowing. Behagel notes that the indefinite article occured only occasionally in Old High German. He ascribes its frequent

occurrence in later periods to French influence.

Examples:

fragte mit einer schrecklichen Miene
hat er zwar mit einem fröhlichen Gesicht und kleinen Lächeln angehört

4.4. Position of the Participle

The participle is positioned after its substantive just as in French. Examples are:

Mein Vater, mit der Absicht zu heiraten umgehend, suchte Quartier
Hier fanden wir eine Menge Personen, die köstlichen Gemälde aufmerksam betrachtend.

The constructions are analogous with the following French constructions.

Un paysant, arrivant à là ville
La femme, s'adressant à son fils

4.5. Exclamatory Expression

The use of abstract terms in constructing exclamatory expressions is similarly ascribed by Behagel to French influence.

O Jammer!
O die groben Akkorde des Schicksals!

The fact that French could influence German lends support to Schmidt's theory that innovations can move across existing demarcation lines. French is a Romance language while German belongs to the West Germanic groups. The examples given above illustrate the possibility of the structure of one language influencing the other. Moreover they show that borrowing depends on objective conditions rather than on the preparedness of the speakers of one language to borrow the feature of another.

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