

Pragmatic borrowing of discourse items: a challenge for cross-linguistic pragmatics

It is well documented that linguistic borrowing is a key product of language contact, and in many respects, it makes sense to talk of a recent shift in focus in research on linguistic borrowing. This shift implies a reorientation of its *locus* from the borrowed lexemes *per se*, to how the use of borrowed items is constrained by cultural, social or cognitive factors, or put differently, a development away from linguistic structuralism towards socio-pragmatics (Author et al.: forthcoming). This paper considers an aspect of so-called ‘pragmatic borrowing’, namely how discourse-pragmatic items are copied from one language to another. The paper argues that this phenomenon poses a particular challenge for empirical research, since cross-linguistic studies in pragmatics are needed in order to explore whether such products of borrowing are characterised by functional stability or functional adaptation in the transfer from the source language (SL) to the recipient language (RL).

I take a fairly wide perspective by incorporating a range of categories under the rubric of discourse-pragmatic features, including interjections, discourse markers, expletives, vocatives, general extenders, tags, focus constructions, intonation and symbolic features (emojis, gestures). Previous studies of pragmatic borrowing have shown that such items are indeed borrowed cross-linguistically (Author 2014). For instance, the French discourse marker (DM) *d'accord* is used in Brussels Dutch (Treffers-Daller 1994), English *so* and *you know* are used in Spanish (Lipsky 2005), the interjections *nå* ‘no’ and *sjur* ‘sure’ are used in Norwegian American (Haugen 1953/1969), etc. However, it is an open question whether/which illocutionary, attitudinal and discourse-structural functions are actually transferred in the process, and the extent to which *post hoc* adaptations occur should be given more scholarly attention. In a study of Cypriot Greek, Terkourafi (2009) illustrates such adaptation, as the English DMs *thank you*, *sorry* and *please* are seen to diverge from their key speech act functions in the SL and instead take on new functions as markers of discourse structure in the RL. Similarly, in a forthcoming study, Peterson shows how the DM *pliis* ‘please’ in Finnish appears to work complementary as a lexical politeness marker that, unlike its English etymon, conveys positive rather than negative politeness (Peterson forthcoming).

This entails that, in order to fully comprehend pragmatic borrowing, we need studies that explore the functional range of such items in both the source and recipient languages, i.e. there is a need for cross-linguistic studies in pragmatics, as addressed by this conference.

I argue that corpus pragmatics (Rühlemann and Aijmer 2016) provides a good methodological framework for cross-linguistic work, and that the study of comparable corpora across languages can shed light on the degree of functional parallelism in pragmatic borrowing.

This argument is illustrated with reference to a set of case studies of English discourse-pragmatic items that have been borrowed into Norwegian. These include the use of *hallo* ‘hello’ as a non-vocative DM that signals dismay, which has gained greater positional flexibility in the RL, where it can be also used in tag position after the proposition expressed. The case studies further include the use of *dude* as an English-induced generalised vocative, phrasal expletives/interjections like *cut the crap* and *what the fuck/heck/hell* and the DMs *yeah right* and *in your dreams* as markers of ironical distance. The cross-linguistic investigation is based on the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), and the Norwegian Newspaper Corpus, and it aims to survey the functional narrowing, broadening and shift in the borrowed items.

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