Lexical Borrowing and Convergence in American Norwegian

In this paper, we ask how lexicons become more similar structurally through language contact, by focusing specifically on lexical convergence and lexical borrowing in American Norwegian. We test this question using distinctions that Clyne (2003) identifies - lexical transference, semantic transference, compromise forms - as a means of establishing what the affected structures are (i.e. lexicon, syntax, phonology) regarding Matras' (2009) "bilingual repertoire" and "selection mechanism". Matras claims that both borrowing and convergence are means of easing the cognitive processes involving the selection mechanism, whose role it is to select context-appropriate forms from the linguistic repertoire. A major prediction to be drawn from this is that, social factors aside, languages in contact will strive to create as much overlap in their respective grammars as possible. For example, the examples of both borrowings and convergence we focus on, have in common that they provide a correlation between semantic structures in American Norwegian and English. Borrowing of an entire lexical item provides semantic as well as phonological correlation between the two languages, thus being an optimal solution due to overlap in two areas of the respective grammars. Overlap in two areas is expected to be preferred over the overlap in one area provided by semantic transfer found in loanshift phenomena. Given the cognitive pressure of maintaining control of two languages we argue that unless there is some reason to avoid lexical borrowing, wholesale borrowing of form and meaning is the optimal process of easing the selection mechanism.

Our data comes from recordings made in the summer of 2010 with heritage speakers of Norwegian living in Minnesota. Lexical borrowing in our speakers' American Norwegian fell into two categories:
1. words that filled semantic gaps
    a. **tractor**
    b. **lumbercamp**
2. words that covered a range of meanings in English. In these cases, rather than apply a second meaning to a Norwegian word, the English word replaced the more specific Norwegian word.
    a. ***barn*** *~ låv/fjøs*
       KS: What did you call this structure?
       hks_m05: That they call that "barn".
       KS: "barn", okay.
       hks_m05: In Norway they call that "fjøs".
       hks_m05: …I had a great uncle who'd come here from Norway, and he'd come over when we were building a big barn, and he looked me and said, "uffda uffda, stora fjøsan". Thats when I caught on to what a barn was in Norway. "Fjøs"
    b. ***råd ("road")*** *~ sti/veg*
    c. ***kipe ("keep")*** *~ beholde/holde*

Lexical convergence creates semantic correspondence with English lexical items, in this case by reducing the meaning of *da* to mean "then". *når* then takes over both past and present tense of "when".

1. loss of distinctions
    a. **når** ~ da ("when")
        i. "Han var to år gammeL *når* an kom hit."
        ii. "Så det var *da* bare engelsk *da*" (hks_m05).
        iii. "...han dødd *når* han var bare seks og tredve år gammel" (gw_m05)

Our analysis shows that while lexical convergence creates a one-to-one correspondence between meanings of Norwegian and English words, lexical borrowing aligns not only semantic properties of a lexical item, but also phonological properties and was thus the preferred strategy among our speakers, allowing speakers to ease the cognitive process of the selection mechanism.

References

Clyne, Michael. 2003. *Dynamics of Language Contact.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Matras, Yaron. 2009. *Language Contact.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.