

## LOAN WORDS OF CHINESE LANGUAGE IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

SOMYA NAYAK

Assistant Professor, Department of Asian Studies (Chinese), School of Arab and Asian Languages,  
The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, India

### ABSTRACT

The word globalization has gained popularity since 1980's. The effects of globalization are seen in many aspects of the society including language. In the process of globalization, many cultures and languages come in contact with each other. Borrowings or loan is the most common phenomenon when two languages come in contact. China was secluded from the rest of the world for a long period of time in history, and thus its language developed in a unique way without much being influenced by any foreign languages. However, the phenomenon of globalization also made China to come in contact with foreign cultures and foreign languages as well. English being international language and being the language of power very soon influenced and lured Chinese population. Besides, Chinese people also realized the necessity of learning English, which is an internationally recognized language. In the course of learning, many English words or the transliteration of many English words occupied a dominant place in the Chinese language system. The paper aims to find out how foreign words, especially English words and what forms of English words made a significant position in the Chinese language system.

**KEYWORDS:** Cultural Contacts, English Language, Chinese Language, Borrowing

### INTRODUCTION

Language is inalienable part of human life; it is an important tool to carry out communication. In other words human life is chiefly expressed through language, though other medium (like actions, gesture, body movements which is known as the body language etc.) of cultural expression does exist. Hence, anybody interested in understanding the culture of a people and the historical development of a society, he has to, first of all, know and understand the language of those people and that society of the period concerned and that of its preceding generations is a must. Chinese language is one of the oldest languages, the history of the recorded language goes back to about 3500 years old, this is when the pre-history is supposed to have come to an end and the history of Chinese society has begun. Having such a long history, it is quite obvious that the Chinese language has undergone time to time changes. However, most of the scholars opine that the changes that occurred in Chinese language time to time is solely because of the domestic factors. It is said the dry, harsh desert, rugged mountain in the North and West and Pacific Ocean in the East formed a natural boundary for China to keep its civilization isolated from others. Thus, it developed and flourished independently in a unique way in the Yellow River and Yang Zi River valley. Though this civilization grew at one corner of the earth, yet the Chinese all along firmly believed that they are located at the center, and thereby they named their country "Zhōngguó" which means "Middle Kingdom" in English. The "Middle Kingdom" because of the isolation from the outside world not only developed a unique culture but the uniqueness is also quite visible in the language. Besides, Chinese characters are the most well-known characteristic of the Chinese language. The Chinese script is truly special. Chinese characters have really influenced the Far East Asian

countries. It has influenced the script of other countries, but was never being influenced by the script of other countries as such. However, talking about the spoken language, some records shows when China came in contact with India in the late Han dynasty, there was a rigorous exchange of culture and religion between two countries. Buddhism was introduced to China and widely accepted by the Chinese people. It is very interesting to note a foreign religion, not a foreign language has created any changes in Chinese language. In the course of religious exchange few new words and concepts were added to the Chinese language system. The very first concept of the loan was introduced to China in Han dynasty from India. However the words which were added to the Chinese language system were restricted to only religious circle. No such influence of foreign languages has been noticed in the then day to day spoken language.

### **Origin and Vigorous Usage of Loans Words in Chinese Language**

The term “loan words” refers to those words which are derived or adapted from one language and has been incorporated in some other languages, both phonetically and semantically. Loan word is an indispensable ingredient and is found in many languages. However, with the passage of time and due to the frequent usage of those terms and expressions, loan words do not remain foreign words, but became an inherent component of the new language system and turned out to be popular among the native speakers in that society. Borrowing is the process of importing linguistic items from one linguistic system into another, a process that occurs any time two cultures are in contact over a period of time.<sup>1</sup> It has all along been a sheer necessity in all societies. People need to add vocabularies to a language system to keep names to the unfamiliar, new concepts. “The necessities of intercourse bring the speakers of one language into direct or indirect contact with those of neighboring or culturally dominant languages... Whatever the degree or nature of contact between neighboring peoples, it is generally sufficient to lead to some kind of linguistic inter-influencing” and “the simplest kind of influence that one language may exert on another is the ‘borrowing’ of words”.<sup>2</sup> The globalization movement and the popularity of technologies too have substantially contributed to the process of linguistic change in the society. As China emerges as a strong economic powerhouse, more and more countries are trying to establish relation with China. People all over the world trying to learn Chinese language to have a better understanding about China and Chinese culture. Thus the standard spoken Chinese is acquiring higher status in the world. This is increasing the mutual influence between English and Standard Chinese language.

In the mid 20th century China came in contact with the Soviet Union and some Soviet origin concepts occupied a dominant place in the Chinese language system. The later part of 20<sup>st</sup> century witnessed a greater influx of loan words, especially after 1978 when the Peoples’ Republic of China widened its opening to the outside world. China came in close contact with the Western World and witnessed a major social change and showed unprecedented interest in foreign exchange, economic and cultural aspects. At the same time being an emerging economic power house got worldwide attention. That time the concept of globalization was developing the cultural and language contacts were intensified. The assimilation of various cultures in the name of globalization also leads to frequent the assimilation of languages. In the course of assimilation, new ideas and thoughts thus got transmitted from one society to the other through new words and vocabularies. In this process of borrowing and offering, the language from which new ideas and words are borrowed is called the source language. The new words or the loan words thus borrowed do not remain as foreign words and vocabularies as such for long and they become part and parcel of the new language system. With no time they become very

<sup>1</sup> Bates L hoper, *Language Borrowing and Language diffusion: An overview*, p.01

<sup>2</sup> Edward Sapir, *Language an introduction to the study of speech*, p. 93

popular among the native speakers and in the society because the ideas and thoughts contained in them got assimilated into the native cultural system. Some words were borrowed and were made an integral part of the Chinese language system by localizing them. The exchange of advanced technology, the exchange of commodities from one society to other also gives rise to new words and concepts.

### **Influence of English in the Formation of New Loans in Chinese Language**

The borrowing abilities of all the languages vary, some languages has strong borrowing abilities, whereas some have week borrowing abilities. The English language has strong borrowing abilities, whereas the Chinese language being flexible in compound formation pattern, can invent new vocabulary items very smoothly. The Chinese language has many monosyllabic morphemes and each Chinese syllable makes sense. Since Chinese linguistic experts are accustomed in using Chinese syllable and Chinese characters which makes sense, hence phonetic loans are not much appreciated in Chinese language. Instead, they try to assimilate their own morpheme with the loans. Hence, many existing phonetic loans in the late 20<sup>st</sup> century were replaced by semantic loans, for example telephone (德律风 Dèlǜfēng), cartoon (卡通 Kǎtōng), film (菲林 Fēilín), jacket (夹克 Jiákè) became “电话”(Diànhuà), “漫画”(Mànhuà), “电影”(Diànyǐng), “大衣”(Dàyī) as per their semantic equivalent. However the young generations of 21st century prefer to use the phonetic loans, but makes sure that they are using meaning morphemes. Besides characters whose essence is reflected through the character itself are chosen to give an explicit meaning to the new loans, for example, hackers as “黑客”( Hēikè black guest), Coca Cola as “可口可乐”( Kěkǒukělè tasty and funny), “拷贝”( Kǎobèi copy). Chinese is basically a monosyllabic language in which each word is a one-syllable morpheme.<sup>3</sup> Hence, when the English words are rendered into Chinese, the syllable plays an important role rather than the phoneme. The new century also saw remarkable change in the phonological and morphological features of the Chinese language system. If a question is raised about what is technically a word, the answer will be that words are nothing but a cluster of sounds with some meaning arbitrarily attached to them. They are thus the outcome of the combination of a number of sounds, technically known as “phoneme”, which is regarded as the smallest divisible unit of any linguistic formation. Hence, the eminent linguist Forrest has observed that, “the first step in studying any spoken language is to determine the phoneme.”<sup>4</sup> Based on this consideration, let us examine the phonological pattern of some of the new vocabulary such as (1) AB- Zhì (AB 制), (2) BMW zú (BMW 族), and (3) EMO- zú (EMO 族) of the reform period. The attempt to use the English alphabet in the formation of new Chinese vocabulary has added a dimension to the indigenous features of Chinese morphology. The phonological pattern that becomes discernible in above linguistic formations is that the English phonemes precede the Chinese syllables. It is also uniformly found that there is only one Chinese syllable that appears towards the end of the whole construction after the English language alphabets. Other words such as 卡拉 ok (karaoke) also show that the Chinese speech sounds precede the English sound. Though the numbers of such words are extremely limited, such formation still assumes obvious significance on the background of strong indigenous features of the Chinese language in contrast to the features of the Modern Indian language (MIL) of our society in which many western language words have been accepted. This also demonstrates the fact that the speech sounds of foreign language may be combined with Chinese sounds to convey certain new ideas and meanings and thus the new formation shatters the boundary of the traditional Chinese speech sound system (*yuyin tixi*). New meanings have been derived from the existing Chinese numerical figures by the young Chinese netizens to make the language more fashionable.

<sup>3</sup> Bloomfield, Leonard. *Language*. P. 207

<sup>4</sup> R.A.D Forrest, *The Chinese language*, p. 13

Numerical figures like “Bā bā”( 八八) is used to mean “Bye Bye” and “Sānjiǔ” (三九) to mean “thank you”. This saves lots of time of the internet users.

In recent years, even new vocabularies, Chinese characters in combination with English words have been added to the Chinese language system. Being exposed to the Western world Chinese people is trying hard to learn English language and considers the usage of a mixture of Chinese and English vocabularies is a symbol of high status and trends. Some of these examples are “好high”, “feel 到”, “很Cute”. Some experts expect that this trend will continue and will be a very common usage in near future. It has also been observed besides using the mixture of English and Chinese vocabularies, the young population use few pure English expressions on a regular basis, such as “Bye-Bye,” “OK,” “Daddy,” “Mummy,” “Yes”, “No”. Moreover, with the popularity of English films, music and international games as well as the great demand of information exchange, more and more English words and terms are blended into Chinese. Therefore, English letter words such as SOS, MTV, and the WTO have gained comparatively wide acceptance because of their convenience and efficiency.<sup>5</sup>

Some words and concept have been adopted by the Chinese people and have changed the words according to their own phonetic structure, for example “Hǎi-pèi” (海佩-happy), “Pài-duì” (派对-Party), but at the same it is also to be noted that these types of changes can also be attributed to the “Substratum Approach”, which says foreign word are partially adopted by the people of other language speaker. Hence the English word “Happy” and Chinese word “Hǎi-pèi” does not share exactly the same phonetic structure. It is a partial adoption. Besides, words like “因特网” (Yīn-tè-wǎng), half translated form semantic “net” and half translated from phonetic “inter”. But the phonetic equivalent of “inter” i.e “因特” (Yīn-tè), was never ever used to coin other vocabularies related to internet. “因特” (Yīn-tè), is just a derivative of “inter”. Some scholars analyzed “因特网”( Yīn-tè-wǎng) as the hybrid of phonetic form plus semantic interpretation.

Another borrowing method which is quite common in Chinese language is literal translation of the English words using the Chinese words, for example “bubble economy” (泡沫经济 Pàomò jīngjì). Bubble economy is a type economy, which becomes successful very fast and then suddenly declines. This expression was commonly used in the media and thus gained the attention of the Chinese media. The Chinese media personals directly translated the word bible as “泡沫” (Pàomò) and thus “bubble economy” in Chinese became “泡沫经济”. With the passage of time the phrase “泡沫” showed a strong combining ability and more words with “泡沫” appeared, “泡沫合同”(Pàomò hétóng), “泡沫文化” (Pàomò wénhuà). Thus the phrase “泡沫” gained a new morphological meaning in Chinese which means “false”.<sup>6</sup>

The above discussion shows that Chinese language of 21<sup>st</sup> century underwent a different type linguistics change as compared to the changes occurred in previous centuries. Talking about the standardization of the borrowed vocabularies, some have already been accepted and is no more considered to be loaned vocabularies. However, some vocabularies, especially vocabularies related to numbers such “Bā bā” (八八 Bye Bye) and “Sānjiǔ” (三九 thank you) has been accepted in the chat rooms as commonly used cyber vocabularies. The expressions used in chat rooms seems weird to linguists, but the prevailing trend cannot be ignored. The usage of such expressions vividly displays the netizens sensibility of the current era.

<sup>5</sup> Kui Zhu, *On Chinese- English Language contact through loan words*, p. 02

<sup>6</sup> Wan Hong, *The Third Wave of Loans in Standard Chinese*, p.181

In the past two, three decades there were a continuous revolution in the communication system. The rise of new communication not only has dramatically decreased the cost of communication, but has also made the communication faster than never before. When the media and communication system was not very advanced, the new terminologies used to spread very slowly; it used to take really long time for a newly emerged terminology to be popular across the country. However, with the emergence of new technologies has given rise to new scenarios and thus gave a new dimension to the language system. A new terminology which emerges at one corner of city gains popularity across the country on the very next day. However, as the media across the country is not unanimous, hence the understanding of the newly emerged terminologies also differs to a great extent. For example the word “BMW族” became extremely popular in 2011, and was used for the people who use public transport like bus, metro or go by walking to their office place are termed as “BMW group”. The first letter of bus (B), metro (M) and walk (W) has been taken to compose the term “BMW group”. This word became popular across the country, but gained a new meaning, especially in South China and used for elite class people who possess a big luxurious car and show their money to exercise power. Hence the word which has been formed in combination with English alphabets and Chinese character has different meaning in different cities of the same country.

### Hong Kong Loans in Modern Standard Chinese

On 1<sup>st</sup> July 1997, the British flag was put down from the government office of the British crown in Hong Kong. The mixed feeling of joy and sorrow engulfed Hong Kong. An enormous celebration held in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1997 on the occasion of Hong Kong’s return to China ending 157 years of colonial rule. Hong Kong’s embarrassment to the mainland China was very smooth and was celebrated at home and abroad as well. Though Hong Kong became a part of mainland China, but free economy and free press remained an integral part of Hong Kong. Hong Kong is allowed to enjoy a high degree of autonomy except for defense and foreign policies. The concept of returning to the motherland (归国 Guī guó) evolved only after Hong Kong’s return to China in 1997. The return of Hong Kong not only diminished the political and economic relation across the strait but many Hong Kong expressions started making their way to the mainland. Since Hong Kong is an international city, language contact is very active and many loan words can be found. The economic, political, technological, cultural and educational expressions of Hong Kong vocabularies easily got amalgamated in the mainlanders’ language system. For example “影视”(Yǐng-shì-Television and Film), “知名度”(Zhī-míng-dù- Popularity), “疲软”(Pí-ruǎn- Soft), “肃贪”(Sù-tān- Crack down on corruption), “推展”(Tuī-zhǎn- Promotion). The word “迷你裙”(Mí-nǐ-qún miniskirt) which is popular in mainland as “超短裙”(Chāo-duǎn-qún) is slowly gaining popularity in mainland. Mainlands nowadays prefer to use “Mí-nǐ-qún” instead of “Chāo-duǎn-qún”. Similarly the word “爱人”(Ài rén) which was used to refer both husband and wife has now been replaced by “老公”(Lǎo-gōng) or “先生”(Xiān-shēng) for husband and “太太”(Tài-tài) for the wife. Besides the political, technological, cultural words, some dialect words also got absorbed in Mandarin Chinese. But compared to cultural, technical and cultural words, very less dialect words got substantive places in Mandarin. For example “大排档”(Dà-pái-dàng-small street food stall near the road), “茶楼”(Chá-lóu-tea hall), “大哥大”(Dà-gē-dà-cord less telephones), “好劲”, (Hǎo-jìn- outstanding).

### CONCLUSIONS

Human thinking keeps on changing with the change of the socio-cultural environment of the society and people, new terms and expressions also evolve and become popular. It may be noted that Chinese society has been changing rapidly over the years with more and more interactions with the foreign culture. Language is a medium through which

culture gets transmitted and English is the international language minimizes the semantic gap and at the same time brings the people of two cultures closer. Hence, when the people of two cultures come in contact there is a rigorous exchange of ideas and thoughts. In order to give expressions to the new ideas and thoughts in their own language new vocabularies are created. The creation of new vocabularies depends on the accepting capacity of the target language. The foreign vocabularies which are accepted and make a permanent position in the target language are the loan words. From the above research, we can conclude that there are four types of borrowing methods which is generally found in Chinese language: transliteration, free translation and blending. Transliteration is the type of conversation of terminologies or words from one language to another using closest corresponding pronunciation. Following are the some transliterated words in the Chinese language transliterated from English. 拷贝 (Kǎobèi-Copy), 炒面 (Chǎomiàn-Chow mein), 台风 (Táifēng- Typhoon), 因特网 (Yīntèwǎng-Internet), 沙发 (Shāfā-Sofa). 萨利, (Sà lì- Saree) and 咖喱 (Gālǐ- Curry) are two most common Hindi word which has been transliterated into Chinese. Free translation is the process of translating a text or word to convey the meaning, but not constrained by the form of the original. For example: 多媒体 (Duōméitǐ Multi-media), 电脑 (Diànnǎo-Computer), 反映 (Fǎnyìng- Reflection), 多民族 (Duō mínzú Multi-ethnic), 名牌 (Míngpái- Brand). Blend vocabularies are the mixture of English initials and Chinese characters. For example: X光 (X guāng- X-Rays), 卡拉 Ok (Kǎlā Ok -Kara Ok), you 盘 (U Pán -Pen drive), Ph 值 (Ph Zhí- pH value). The usage of English alphabets in the formation of vocabularies in the Chinese language system, though limited, yet such formations add new dimension to the indigenous features of Chinese morphology.

## REFERENCES

1. Bates, L hopper. (2002). *Language Borrowing and Language diffusion: An overview*, Intercultural Communication studies XI: 4, Trinity University. Accessed at <http://web.uri.edu/iaics/files/01-Bates-L.-Hoffer.pdf> on April 22, 2017.
2. Edward Sapir. (1921). *Language an introduction to the study of speech*, New York, Harcourt, Brace. Accessed at <http://www.ugr.es/~fmanjon/Sapir,%20Edward%20-%20Language,%20An%20Introduction%20to%20the%20Study%20of%20Speech.pdf> on April 29, 2017
3. Kui Zhu. (2011). *In Chinese- English Language contact through loanwords*, English Language and Literature studies, Vol-01, No-02.
4. Li, Xiaofei. (2004). *Infiltration of Culture by Borrowed Words into English and Chinese.*, Shandong Foreign Language Teaching Journal, Accessed at <http://dx.doi.org/1002-2643.0.2004-01-011> on 12 May 2017.
5. Liu, Yanshi. (2004). *Study of Borrowed Words in English and Chinese Through Cultural Contact*. Journal of the Chengdu Municipal Party College of C.P.C, Accessed at <http://dx.doi.org/1008-679x.0.2004-06-025> on 17 May 2017.
6. Pinkham, J. (2000). *The Translator's Guide to Chinglish*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.
7. Shi, Youwei. (2000). *Chinese Loanwords*. The Commercial Press.
8. Yun, Yan. Deng, Tianbai. (2009). *On Chinese loan words from English language*. English Language Teaching, Vol-02, No-04.