Internal and external correlates of the integration of English- and Spanish-origin loanwords in Montréal French

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Poplack et al.’s (1988) seminal study of English-origin loanwords in Ottawa-Hull French correlated loanword integration with several social factors, notably the level of bilingualism in each neighborhood. However, the sociolinguistic aspects of loanword integration have rarely been studied in more recent work.

The present study fills this gap by considering the social correlates of the degree of loanword integration in more recent Canadian French data from sociolinguistic interviews conducted in Montréal. This study also expands upon previous work by examining loanwords from both English (a high-contact language with special political status) and Spanish (a low-contact language associated mostly with the immigrant population).

The results indicate that there are different motivations for borrowing from these two languages: a product of more recent contact, Spanish loanwords fill semantic gaps, while such is not always the case for English-origin loanwords. Multivariate analyses reveal that in both cases degree of loanword integration is related to the word’s date of first attestation and to frequency in the data set. Individual bilingualism in French and the source language (English or Spanish) is also a factor of primary importance. For the English-origin words, social class is also a strong predictor, with lower social classes favoring loanword integration. No sex or age effects are found, suggesting stable patterns across time. For Spanish-origin words, sex and age effects suggest possible change in progress, likely due to increased contact with Spanish across the latter half of the twentieth century.

Contra Poplack et al. (1988), no clear effect of neighborhood of residence was found. Thus, while most of the findings are consistent with Poplack et al.’s (1988) results for Ottawa-Hull, this is a notable exception, argued to arise from differences in the history and nature of French-English contact in Ottawa-Hull as compared to Montréal.

Reference