A critique of linguistic borrowing from a translanguaging perspective

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This paper analyses borrowing from a sociolinguistic and translanguaging perspective through which it is viewed as a site for linguistic contestation, struggle, and power where some languages benefit while others lose out. The paper problematizes the process of borrowing and presents it as both empowering and disempowering. Empowerment is realized when borrowing is viewed as a translanguaging strategy through which loanwords are seen as representing creativity, dynamism, and the free movement of linguistic elements across language boundaries. Disempowerment is seen in linguistic prestige which causes restrictions in the movement of linguistic elements, language loss, lack of documentation, and insufficient etymologization which all lead to failure to acknowledge the contribution and existence of minority languages in the development of dominant languages.

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1.   Introduction

Borrowing, loanwords, or transfer of linguistic elements from one language to another are products of language contact and multilingualism. Hock (1986, p.380) defines linguistic borrowing as "the adoption of individual words or even large sets of vocabulary items from another language or dialect." Similarly, Thomason and Kaufman (1988, p.21) refer to borrowing as "the incorporation of foreign elements into the speaker's native language." Thomason and Kaufman (1988, p.20) also quote Moravcsik (1978. p.99) as using the term to refer to a process whereby a language acquires some structural property from another language. We can therefore assume that since all languages have had contact with others, all languages have borrowed from others. English for example, has borrowed extensively from French and Latin. Otlogetswe's (2012) Setswana Dictionary contains over one thousand Setswana loanwords such as *kopi* (Afrikaans *koppie* which means cup), *buka* (English book), *baesekele* (English bicycle), *fenstere* (Afrikaans *venster* which means window), and lebenkele (Afrikaans *winkel* which means shop). Though most dictionaries only indicate a small percentage of loanwords, etymological studies suggest that in any given language there are more borrowings than native words (see Haspelmath and Tadmor (2009).

Hock and Joseph (1996) state that the two main motivations for lexical borrowing are firstly, an attempt to fill lexical gaps and secondly, to gain prestige which is derived from using a loanword out of respect or admiration for the source language. These benefits of borrowing portray it as an enriching process through which a language can expand and develop not by relying on its own linguistic resources and materials but by utilizing the materials and resources of other languages. Borrowing highlights the complementarity of languages which is facilitated or realized by a liberal exchange of linguistic elements. The process also gives important insights into the sociocultural circumstances of the contact situation in which linguistic elements were transferred. For example, through loanwords, the history of a society and its interactions with other societies can be traced.

This paper calls for further research on the concept of borrowing especially in the light of new tenets such as translanguaging. The paper is concerned with the unilateral approach to borrowing whereby only the positive effects of borrowing (such as expansion and development of languages) are emphasized. By critiquing borrowing from a translanguaging perspective, this paper problematizes the process of borrowing, presents it as both empowering and disempowering, as a site for linguistic contestation, struggle, and power where some languages benefit while others lose out. Thus, the paper invertedly presents the benefits and limitations of both borrowing and translanguaging. The first part of the paper highlights the benefits whilst the second part highlights the limitations.

2.   Borrowing from a translanguaging perspective

The definitions cited above do not only posit borrowing as a movement of linguistic features across languages, but they also suggest that linguistic features reside or belong to certain languages and then they are transferred to other languages where they are adopted and adapted. Such definitions or understanding of borrowing complicate the application of the translanguaging theory which represents liberation in the movement of linguistic features across language boundaries but challenges the idea of fixed linguistic boundaries and assignment of linguistic features to specific languages. Translanguaging is an all-encompassing term that includes diverse multilingual and multimodal practices such as code-switching, code-mixing, hybrid language practices, and flexible bilingualism. For Li Wei (2018, p.20) translanguaging transcends the traditional divides between linguistic and non-linguistic cognitive and semiotic systems. Li Wei (2018, p.15) states that;

> translanguaging is not conceived as an object or a linguistic structural phenomenon to describe and analyse but a practice and a process—a practice that involves dynamic and functionally integrated use of different languages and language varieties, but more importantly a process of knowledge construction that goes beyond language(s). It takes us beyond the linguistics of systems and speakers to a linguistics of participation.

Li Wei (2018, p.22) argues that translanguaging foregrounds the different ways language users employ, create, and interpret different kinds of signs to communicate across contexts and participants and perform their different subjectivities. It highlights the ways in which language users can resolve gaps, tensions, and conflicts in their communication using whatever available linguistic elements. They can do that because languages should be understood to be neither fixed, nor autonomous nor have clear linguistic boundaries between them. Blommaert (2012, p.3) argues that it is inaccurate to view linguistic elements as belonging to certain languages. He claims that:

> a language in its actual reality only occurs in the shape of small fragments … that can be combined with other available fragments for the purpose of meaning making. Some of these fragments are associated with French, Chinese, etc. All these features actually enter into meaning making processes regardless of the conventional attributions we bestow on them.

Blommaert (2012, p.2) argues that we must start seeing languages and linguistic elements "as mobile objects, not tied to an organic, specific community, not residing in a particular space but moving around such places and communities in intensive ways, on the rhythm of globalizing flows

of commodities, people, messages, and meanings." What Blommaert is describing is more apparent in multilingual and bilingual situations where the language practices of bilinguals are seen not as two autonomous language systems as has been traditionally the case, but as one linguistic repertoire with features that have been societally constructed as belonging to two separate languages, (see García and Li Wei (2014, p.2). The views expressed above make sense considering the wide-ranging interconnections between languages, and their elements.

Borrowing with its creativity, fluidity, dynamism, and flexibility properties responds to all the parameters of translanguaging. It is a strategy that represents language users' ability to pick up small bits of language from contact languages and combine them with what they already have yet remain oblivious to the origins or sources of those elements. In her study of the patterns of loanword usage by Setswana speakers in Botswana, Moji (2015) found out that most native Setswana speakers are not able to distinguish loanwords from native ones. This linguistic behaviour, which is not unique to Setswana speakers, suggests that speakers of languages are generally not concerned about the compartments to which elements of their linguistic stock belong. Borrowing also represents the creativity of speakers to generate new words and new meanings using material from other languages. Further, it reflects a combination of cognitive processes of negotiating and producing meaningful, comprehensible output, mediating, problem-solving, making meaning, and shaping knowledge and experience, (see Swain (2006).

The creative ability of borrowing to produce loanwords fits into Li Wei (2011) and García and Li Wei's (2014) so-called linguistic third space. This is a space that dispels predominant narratives of pure languages as essentializing constructions, and positions all languages in a state of flux and makes them hybrids. Bhabha (1994, p.103) argues that "this hybrid is not presented or viewed as a pale imitation of either of its purer ancestors, but as the breeding place for something new that is more than the sum of its parts." For Li Wei (2011, p.1223), the third space is 'transformative in nature because it creates a social space where different identities, values, and practices do not simply co-exist, but combine to generate new identities, values, and practices. In the third space, users push and break boundaries between named languages and between language varieties.

The translanguaging theory also gives a new perspective to the so-called extinct or dead languages. Seen from a translanguaging perspective, the process of borrowing suggests that there are no dead languages. Contrary to popular belief, the so-called dead or extinct languages live on, vicariously, in the languages that have borrowed from them. For example, Latin, a so-called dead language or its linguistic elements is alive, in different forms in modern languages such as English, French, and Spanish. For example, such lexical items as *ad hoc*, *agenda, atrocity*, *avarice, carpe diem,* and *de facto* are said to originate from Latin. Furthermore, some such Latin elements must have by now been transferred to other languages that have borrowed from English. Thus, the linguistic elements of such a dead language have been borrowed, transformed, and adapted to create new forms, new meanings, and new identities that reside in new spaces.

There has been a lot of discussion about the survival, contribution, influence, and lack of documentation of Khoisan languages in Botswana. This concern is raised by Chebanne (2012) in his paper titled, "*Where are the skeletons of dead Khoisan languages*" in which he concedes that the scanty documentation on Khoisan languages has resulted in their loss and death. Chebanne (2012, p.81)) laments the lack of documentation on the Khoisan languages and argues that the "Khoisan languages will, as was in the past, die and not leave even any 'skeletons' that will inform the future about their existence." This paper argues that the skeletons of such languages can be

traced and found alive in modern languages which they have given birth to or languages such as Setswana which have borrowed from them.

Gunnink (2020, p.28) argues "that the extent of Khoisan lexical influence on Setswana and other Bantu languages may well be larger than we can determine." History informs us that by the time the first Sotho Tswana group arrived in Bechuanaland, in the 14th Century, speakers of Khoisan languages were already settled in the country. Though they became marginalized and finally got pushed out of the heartland by the dominant Sotho Tswana groups that followed around 1540, speakers of Khoisan languages have, to date, remained in close contact with Setswana speakers through marriage or by working for them. Khoisan languages have had a lot of influence on Setswana because of Khoisan's vast knowledge of the local vegetation and animals, their use of Setswana as a second language, and their children's use of Setswana as a first language. Language shift from Khoisan languages to Setswana is quite common (see Batibo (1998), Chebanne (2008), and Smieja and Batibo (2000). It is reasonable to argue that a lot of linguistic elements have been transferred in this shift. However, despite evidence showing extensive interactions between Setswana and Khoisan speakers, both now and in the past, Gunnink (2020, p.28) says Khoisan linguistic influence in Setswana has rarely been identified because some Khoisan languages are extinct and most of them are not documented. Indeed, Setswana dictionaries indicate very little, if any, loans from Khoisan languages.

However, Gunnink (2020, p.34) argues that "non-identification of source words does not mean a word is not of Khoisan origin." By phonologically reconstructing such phoneme sequences as /k, kh, ŋ, tʃ, dʒ, ts, tsh, χ, qh/ in Setswana, Gunnink has been able to determine that they come from the click sounds which she argues are cross-linguistically highly uncommon phonemes in Bantu languages but are only found in Khoisan languages. She argues that these phonemes are most likely acquired from Khoisan (Gunnink 2020, p.34). By tracing these phonemes to the Khoisan click sounds, Gunnink has been able to identify "171 Setswana words that contain phoneme sequences that suggest a possible Khoisan origin." Some of her examples include:

> Setswana tsálá (friend) from Juǀ'hoan ǂàrà or Khwe ǂgárà, or Naro tsālā.
> Setswana kʰàdì 'alcoholic drink'
> Setswana kʰáí 'cloth, fabric, linen'
> Setswana lì -tʃʰá, (lake) from Khoe
> Setswana ø-qʰámá (red hartebeest) from a Khoe word ǁχama 'hartebeest'

We can therefore conclude that Khoisan languages and their elements have made a lot of contributions to the development of Setswana and Sotho languages and therefore continue to live in or through these languages, in a different form and space. A translanguaging perspective supports borrowing and views languages that export more of their linguistic elements as actually regenerating themselves and extending their existence beyond their linguistic and geographical spaces. Such languages or their elements will never die, instead, they will be transformed into new identities in new spaces.

3.   Borrowing as a symbol of linguistic contestation

The discussion above suggests that from a translanguaging perspective, borrowing can be seen to transform and liberate language. In this section, the paper argues that, like other multilingualism and

language contact processes, borrowing masks linguistic struggles and inequality between languages. The paper argues that borrowing is a socially and linguistically regulated process which does not empower all landguages equally. For example, in the process of borrowing, dominant languages are favourably positioned as donors of linguistic elements whilst non-dominant languages are unfavourably positioned as receivers. This suggests that borrowing is not neutral, it does not represent free flow of linguistic elements but rather it perpetuates linguistic inequality, and the process is influenced as well as regulated by languages and speakers with higher social or economic prestige.

Haspelmath and Tadmor (2009, p.40) state that although all languages have loanwords, it is believed that the directionality of borrowing is understandably predictable, for the most part, loanwords move from dominant languages (those associated with development and civilization) to less dominant languages. The direction of borrowing represents a form of power play in the sense that dominant languages or societies borrow less and export more. This view is also shared by Moravcsik (1978, p.109) who argues that "nothing can be borrowed from a language which is not regarded as prestigious by speakers of the borrowing language." In so doing, borrowing reproduces existing socio-political relationships of inequality that are found in languages and their speakers.

3.1   Social prestige and borrowing. Higa (1973, p.75) observes that "the study of word borrowing has not been popular in the United States probably because the amount of word borrowing in modern American English has relatively been small. It may be that American culture has had more to give than receive in its contact with other languages." Higa (1973) believes that the cultural, economic, and military status of a society influences the direction of borrowings into or out of that society. For example, he argues that:

> mutual borrowing or non-borrowing takes place when two cultures in contact are equally dominant or not dominant or when the dominee relationship is not clearly established. For example, there seems to have been little word borrowing between the two superpowers: America and Russia in recent years. But Japanese has borrowed a great number of words from American English but not vice versa (Higa 1973, p.76).

Thomason and Kaufman (1988) too agree that although there could be an influence on both languages, in a language contact situation, the dominant language often exhibits a stronger influence over the subordinate language. Matiki and Ramaeba (2015)'s study confirms this finding, it indicates that English, the language considered to be culturally and economically higher than Setswana, has loaned Setswana 694 words. In contrast, English has not borrowed many Setswana words. Similarly, Setswana has a few loanwords from such minority languages as Khoisan and Ikalanga languages with which it shares physical space and speakers. However, this paper argues that the issue of prestige which influences the directionality of loanwords needs to be re-examined in the context of insufficient etymologization and poor documentation of some languages, especially minority languages such as Khoisan. These factors cause a lot of misrepresentations or false generalizations in contact situations when it comes to which language has borrowed, what it has borrowed, how much has been borrowed, and thus the directionality of borrowing.

The study of etymology suggests that all languages have borrowed from others and that in any given language there are more borrowings than native words. However, most dictionaries only show a small percentage of the borrowings. Zenner, Rosseel, and Calude (2019) have observed that:

the ease with which foreign lexical material can be transferred from one language to the next is reflected in the fact that "in virtually every bilingual situation empirically studied, borrowed items make up the overwhelming majority of other-language material." The strong presence of loanwords in languages' lexical inventories is however not reflected in the amount of scholarly attention devoted to the topic, leaving some questions quite insufficiently addressed.

Furthermore, this paper argues that in situations where a dominant language is encircled by a non-dominant language, such as English in the environment of African languages, the trend or directionality is likely to be reversed. However, even in these situations, English dictionaries would still show a few borrowings from African languages into English while African Englishes dictionaries (such as dictionary of South African English, Ghanaian English, or West African English) would include a lot more borrowings from African languages. This paper argues that these borrowings which are contained in the stock of new Englishes often fail to make their way into English dictionaries or standard English because of English language gatekeepers' futile attempt to maintain a pure form of English. Borrowings from dominant languages such as French, on the other hand, often, easily, and quickly find their way into standard English dictionaries. Acknowledgment of contributions from dominant languages is seen as an elevation while contributions from non-dominant languages are seen as a demotion of a language.

It should be noted that what linguistic elements constitute the stock of a standard variety or what goes into a dictionary, is taught in school, or is used in the media is subjective and based on prescriptivism and social intervention by gatekeepers who attempt to keep languages and varieties pure. The gatekeepers fail to acknowledge and accept the mobility and fluidity of linguistic elements. There is extensive marginalization of items borrowed from non-dominant or minority languages such as Khoisan, Ikalanga, and Sekgalagadi into standard Setswana. Dialects of Setswana that have borrowed from these languages have equally been side-lined or not considered to represent standard Setswana. This is evident in some dialects of Setswana such as Setawana, Sepedi and Sekhurutshe which have borrowed heavily from minority languages and as a result have been side-lined when it comes to determining what constitutes standard Setswana. Features of Setawana (a dialect of Setswana which is spoken in the northwest), Sekhurutshe (a dialect of Setswana spoken in the northern part of the country), and Sepedi (a dialect spoken in the central) do not feature much in standard Setswana which is taught in schools, used in the media or found in dictionaries. The effect of Ikalanga on the Sekhurutshe dialect which has produced such loanwords as *tandabala* (pensioner's allowance), *ledumbana* (house), *senyatsamolomo* (a traditional marriage practice), ledelele (local vegetable), *mophani* (indigenous tree), or *gagarika* (unstable) are not found in Setswana dictionaries. Though speakers of this dialect are proto-Tswana and direct descendants of the senior Tswana dynasty, their dialect no longer features much in standard Setswana because of their heavy borrowing from the minority Ikalanga language.

Lack of documentation, extinct languages and failure to etymologize linguistic items also pose a challenge when it comes to determining the contribution of different languages in the process of borrowing. Linguistic elements from extinct and undocumented such as Khoisan languages are difficult to identify or trace. Because of lack of documentation and failure to etymologize all words it is difficult to trace the source of most words. Most minority languages are not documented, making their contributions in the dominant languages invisible or difficult to trace. Heller (1965, p.113) argues that one of the "major flaws in the etymological practice of modern dictionaries is their failure to etymologize all words." Most dictionaries cherry-pick which words to etymologize and which ones to gloss over. Further, it is not clear at which point a loanword no longer needs

etymologization. For example, many English loans from Latin and French which have been fully adopted, adapted, and nativized are no longer etymologized. Heller (1965, p.113) argues that the reason dictionaries fail to etymologize all words is because of the practical necessity to save space and the avoidance of difficult problems of historical development. Whatever the reason, Heller argues that this failure has led to many loanwords in dictionaries being passed on as native words and or erroneously endowing some languages with features that they do not actually originate from. Heller argues that this misinformation creates a problem of forestalling the need for additional research required to uncover the history of the word.

In this era of globalization which has caused rapid language contact, processes such as borrowings and transfers have become more complex and need a multi-pronged approach because borrowings and transfers are not unidirectional, they are multi-directional and multi-dimensional. For example, Setswana loanwords such as *khamera* (camera) and *telebeshene* (television) which are considered English loans actually originate from French, making it difficult to determine, with the constant movement and interaction of people, whether Setswana borrowed the items from English or French. Such examples indicate a problem in the approach, depth, and scope of etymology.

Further, excessive borrowing, just like frequent use of a second language, has been shown to have negative effects on the receiving language. The process of borrowing puts non-dominant and minority languages who are always on the receiving end at risk of losing their identities. For example, in Botswana, Setswapong which has borrowed extensively from Setswana is in danger of losing its identity and being engulfed by Setswana. Batibo (1998, p.10) points out that there is an 86% lexical overlap between Setswapong and Setswana. Malepa (2008, p.viii) has also concluded that Sebirwa in Maunatlala and Mogapi has been assimilated by Sengwato (a dialect of Setswana) which is politically and numerically powerful. She states that:

> though the Maunatlala and Mogapi people perceive themselves to be speaking Sebirwa, they can be best described to be speaking a version of Sengwato as they have accumulated a lot of Sengwato vocabulary. Lexical evidence shows that they are closer to Sengwato than other Sebirwa dialects. What is left among these groups is the Sebirwa pronunciation, otherwise the vocabulary is almost similar to Sengwato, (p.66).

The examples in this section illustrate how borrowing mirrors current socio-political relationships of inequality in languages. The section demonstrates that borrowing does not empower or benefit minority and non-dominant languages as much as dominant ones. Minority languages' contributions are not adequately acknowledged or appreciated in the whole borrowing process.

4.   Conclusion

This paper calls for a more critical and balanced view of borrowing. Using the translanguaging theory, the paper has presented borrowing as additive, used by languages to enrich themselves and meet new and emerging linguistic needs and as subtractive, where non-dominant and minority language are presented as mere recipients with little contribution. Borrowing is therefore presented as a site for both resolution and contestation. This paper problematizes the process of borrowing, presenting it as both empowering and as disempowering. The empowerment is realized when borrowing is viewed as a translanguaging strategy through which loanwords are seen as representing creativity and flexibility whilst disempowerment is seen in the linguistic prestige which causes restrictions in movement of linguistic elements, language loss, lack of documentation and

insufficient etymologization which lead to failure to acknowledge the contribution and existence of minority languages in the development of dominant languages.

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