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SUBSTRATE LEXICAL INFLUENCE ON GERMANIC IN THE LIGHT OF THE LANGUAGE CONTACT THEORY

Abstract:

*The author discusses the lexical influence of the Pre-Germanic substrate into Proto-Germanic, demonstrating the phenomenon of borrowing and infiltration in Proto-Germanic in the light of modern contact theory. The most obvious examples, e.g. Gmc. *hundaz m. 'dog' (< PIE. *kwntō- 'puppy, young dog' < *kwōn 'dog') vs. Gmc. (substratal LW) *hwelpaz m. 'puppy, young dog' (< PIE. *g^welbhos m. 'womb; embryo', also 'young of an animal'), are carefully reviewed. It is concluded that the purely Germanic words acquired a more elevated meaning, whereas the substrate loanwords were semantically degraded. Thus the Germanic people enjoyed higher social prestige than the substrate population of Indo-European origin.*

Key words:

Linguistics; Pre-Germanic; Proto-Germanic; Lexical Influence; Language Contact Theory

1. Introduction to the problem.

This study attempts to analyze the phenomena of borrowing and infiltration (lexical penetration) in Germanic, as well as the problem of the Pre-Germanic substrate, in the light of the modern contact linguistics, the theory of which was best laid out in 1951 by Uriel WEINREICH in his doctoral dissertation, now edited for the first time in a new elaboration (WEINREICH 2011). The classical version of the contact linguistics was presented in his monograph *Languages in Contact* (WEINREICH 1953, 7th edition 1970), translated into German as *Sprachen in Kontakt* (WEINREICH 1977). The issues associated with language contact may be summed up in the following major points:

1. bilingualism or, less frequently, multilingualism, i.e. the phenomenon of using two (or more) languages and regularly switching between them depending on language communication;

2. the process of interference, understood as a bilingual speaker's departing from the language standard under the influence of language contact;
3. the process of convergence, consisting in different languages' coming closer to each other under the influence of language contact;
4. the socio-cultural background of language contact.

Weinreich's monographs give the best presentation of research concerning language contact, especially in Switzerland (KIM 2010). They are only partially augmented by a collection of newer works on the subject featured in the volume *Languages in Contact 2010* (CHRUSZCZEWSKI, WĄSIK 2010). The need to discuss the substrate lexical influence, including borrowings and infiltrations, stems from the fact that Uriel WEINREICH neither distinguishes between the phenomena of infiltration and borrowing of words (using the term 'borrowing' in the traditional meaning, which we may now openly call outdated) nor pays much attention to the issue of the substrate, although it belongs by definition to the theory of language contact. It is, therefore, not surprising that the concept of the substrate is mentioned only occasionally in WEINREICH'S monographs, whereas – as noted by L. BEDNARCZUK (1990: 79 = 2012: 30) – out of the 658 bibliography entries only 5 (randomly chosen) titles concern substrate issues. The situation is very similar in other works that deal with language contact. On the other hand, in the works which concern the problem of the substrate little attention is usually paid to the theory of language contact, the mechanisms involved and the socio-cultural background (WITCZAK 1992).

In the light of what has been said, there is little doubt that the above-mentioned issues must be dealt with.

2. Borrowings vs. infiltrations (with examples from Proto-Germanic vocabulary)

The term *borrowing*, also glossed as *loan-word* or *import* (MAROUZEAU 1960: 104), traditionally defined as “an element (most often a word, less frequently an affix) transferred from another language” (GOŁĄB, HEINZ, POLAŃSKI 1968: 440) requires updating and specification due to the methodological progress in the field of contact linguistics. In the traditional approach, only the transfer itself was analysed, the structure of the languages' semantic systems being left out of consideration. The imperfection of such an approach was already noticed by M. BRÉAL (1924), who pointed to the fact that each language's semantic system contains a number of sets of words, which are contemporarily called semantic microstructures. Each of those microstructures consists of one unmarked word with a broader range of meaning and one or

more marked words with a narrower range, and therefore with more specific features. Within each microstructure there exists an opposition between the word with the broader meaning, which is the unmarked element, and each of the words with a related but narrower meaning (i.e. richer in features), which are the marked elements of the opposition. Depending on the relation towards the microstructures already existing in the language, the phenomena of borrowing and infiltration of words may be distinguished between.

We may speak of a borrowing when the transferred word does not encounter any microstructure of similar meaning, any synonym, in other words it solely serves to fill a lexical gap in the language's semantic system. In this case it migrates from one language to another together with the position it used to occupy in the original language's semantic system. For example, the Scythian word *kanabis* (hence Greek *κάνναβις* and Latin *cannabis*) 'hemp' was transferred together with the concept, i.e. borrowed by the Germanic people and preserved as **hanapaz* or **hanapiz* (cf. OIcel.¹ *hanpr*, OE. *hænep*, E. *hemp*, OSax. *hanup*, OHG. *hanaf*, *hanif*, G. *Hanf* 'hemp'²) due to the consonant shift, typical for the Proto-Germanic language. Here, the new word entered the language together with the new concept without opposition and with no meaning shift, because there was no competition in the lexical system.

When the transferred word, however, encounters in the language's lexical system a native synonym which denotes an already known concept and belongs to a particular semantic microstructure, we call it infiltration. Because language economy does not allow for the coexistence of two absolute synonyms, competition between the two terms emerges, which results either in the disappearance of one of them or in a shift in its meaning. The exact outcome of this process depends on the social prestige of the languages involved. The synonym stemming from the language of the 'higher' social prestige acquires a more dignified meaning, whereas the word from the socially 'lower' dialect, pushed aside and degraded, obtains the meaning of an inferior variant³. The analysis of meaning

1 Abbreviations used: Arm. = Armenian; Dan. = Danish, Du. = Dutch; E. = (Modern) English; Goth. = Gothic; G. = (Modern) German; Georg. = Georgian; Gk. = Greek; Icel. = Icelandic; IE. = Indo-European; Lat. = Latin; Lith. = Lithuanian; MHG. = Middle High German; MLG. = Middle Low German; OChSl. = Old Church Slavonic; OE. = Old English; OFris. = Old Frisian; OHG. = Old High German; OIcel. = Old Icelandic; OInd. = Old Indic; OPrus. = Old Prussian; OSax. = Old Saxon; PGmc. = Proto-Germanic; PIE. = Proto-Indo-European; Pol. = Polish, SC = Serbo-Croatian.

2 OREL (2003: 159) prefers PGmc. **xan(a)paz* m. (*a*-stem) 'hemp', also KLUGE and SEEBOLD (1999: 354) give **hanapa-* m. (*a*-stem), whereas RINGE (2006: 297) reconstructs PGmc. **hanapiz* m. (*i*-stem).

3 A good description of this process operating in the Romance languages was given by M. BRÉAL, who showed that e.g. a speaker from Savoy uses the standard French terms *père* and *mère* when speaking of his parents, however when animals are referred to, the local dialect words *pâre* and *mâre* are used (from Lat. *pater* 'father', acc. sg. *patrem* and *mâter* 'mother', acc. sg. *mâterem*).

shifts occurring in semantic microstructures reveals the process of evaluating native / foreign synonyms and shows which of the languages had the ‘higher’ social prestige (MILEWSKI 1966: 133–134).

MARTYNOV (1963: 38–42), analyzing the processes of borrowing and infiltration, pointed to the significant disparity in their origin. Thus, borrowings emerge chiefly due to the export or import of various cultural goods from one community to another and do not, in fact, require immediate language contact. On the other hand, the main cause of infiltration of words from one language to another is a direct geographical contact between those languages and the emergence or a bilingual or multilingual area. Accordingly, it is apparent that the sociolinguistic mechanisms of borrowing and infiltration are altogether different.

3. The mechanism of infiltration.

The following is a demonstration of how the mechanism of infiltration (or lexical penetration) works as regards some Proto-Germanic words of substrate origin⁴. The substrate word **kvappō* f. ‘frog’ (from IE. **gh^wə₁bhā* f. ‘frog’, cf. OPrus. *gabawo*, OChSl. *žaba*, SC. *žäba*, Russ. *žaba* ‘id.’⁵), having infiltrated the Proto-Germanic language, encountered a native synonym (PGmc. **fruskaz* m. ‘frog’: OIcel. *froskr*, OHG. *frosch*, G. *Frosch*, OE. *frox*, MLG. *vorsch*⁶). Consequently, the substrate word acquired a new meaning ‘something gelatinous, fat woman’ on the one hand (Icel. *kvap*, *kvapi* ‘jelly, something gelatinous’, Swed. dial. *kvebba*, *skvebba* ‘fat woman’, Dan. *kwab*, *kwabbe* ‘frog, swell, goitre’), and a second one on the other – ‘a species of fish, burbot’ (OSax. *quappa*, *quappia*, *quappo* ‘id.’, MHG. *quap(p)e*, *kobe*, G. *Quappe*)⁷. As can easily be seen, what happened here was the degradation of the substrate word (PGmc. **kvappō* f.) as opposed to the native synonym (PGmc. **fruskaz* m.).

The complicated mechanism of infiltration works in a different way in the case of the substrate word **hwelpaz* ‘puppy, young dog’ (originally ‘young animal’), which stems from the Indo-European prototype **g^welbhos*, **g^wolbhos*

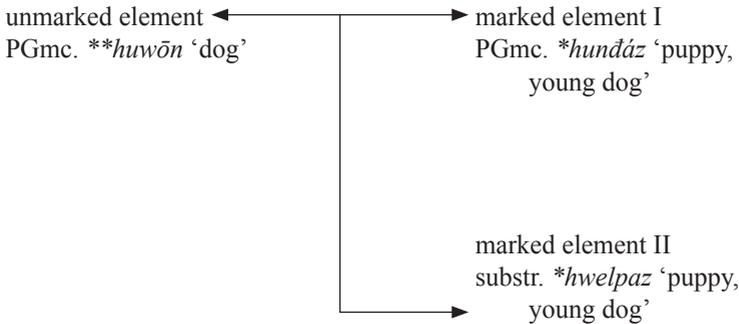
4 The problem of a substrate influence on Common Germanic is critically reviewed by BOUTKAN and SIEBINGA (2005: XIII–XVII). I distinguish between two substrate layers in the Proto-Germanic vocabulary: the older Pre-Indo-European layer and a newer one of Indo-European origin (WITCZAK 1996). The examples mentioned here belong to the Indo-European substrate.

5 DERCKSEN (2008: 553) suspects “a substratum origin” of the Germanic, Baltic and Slavic words. See also Lat. *biŕfō* m. (*n*-stem) ‘toad’. The Indo-European reconstruction proposed here is further justified by an Indo-European borrowing in Kartvelian, cf. Georgian *žywabe* ‘frog’.

6 KLUGE, SEEBOLD (1999: 288), OREL (2003: 116).

7 See KLUGE, SEEBOLD (1999: 659).

What ensued in Proto-Germanic was the following situation:



A competition began, which resulted in the emergence of a new microstructure. The foreign (substrate) word **hwelpaz* (m.), having established the meaning ‘puppy, young dog’, remained marked (whence OIcel. *hvelpr* ‘whelp’, OE. (*h*)*welp*, E. *whelp*, OSax. *hwelp*, OHG. *welf* ‘id.’¹⁰), whereas the native word **hundáz*, having replaced the former basic term with the (awkward) athematic inflection (IE **k̑wōn*, gen. sg. **k̑unós* ‘dog’), became an unmarked element with a more general, broader meaning (whence Goth. *hunds*, OIcel. *hundr*, OE. *hund*, OFris. *hund*, *hond*₂, OSax. *hund*, OHG. *hunt*, G. *Hund* etc.¹¹). Ultimately, then, the following situation developed:



In each of the three analyzed cases the process of infiltration worked in a different way (in the first and second case, the substrate word was semantically degraded in relation to the native synonym, while in the third one the meaning of the native term underwent generalization in relation to the substrate one), however the result was identical: the native words acquired a more elevated meaning, whereas the substrate ones were semantically degraded, which would indicate that the Proto-Germanic people enjoyed higher social prestige than the population representing the Indo-European substrate.

¹⁰ OREL (2003: 200).

¹¹ POKORNY (1959: 632–633); OREL (2003: 193); BOUTKAN, SIEBINGA (2005: 184). See also ON. *hyndla* ‘small dog’, a diminutive form of ON. *hundr* m. ‘dog’.

4. The substrate and the processes of infiltration and borrowing.

The theory of the substrate, understood as an influence of an ethnic background (usually already non-existent or even historically unattested), was created on the basis of Romance linguistics, predominantly to account for phenomena that could not be explained on the grounds of Latin. The term was finally clarified by Walther von WARTBURG (1950: 155–160), who also gave an in-depth description of the process.

In general, when a people comes to inhabit a foreign-language area, immediate language contact emerges, whereby bilingualism is induced; thereupon, a number of bilingual generations follow, after which one of the languages prevails. Numerous circumstances decide which of the two languages gains dominance, most of them being extra-linguistic. As far as language contact is concerned, the following factors belong here:

1. the size and degree of homogeneity of the bilingual socio-cultural group;
2. the prestige of the languages in question (cf. above, chapter 2);
3. the outlook on bilingualism and interference,
4. the attitude to the rest of the population.

Additionally, further factors may contribute to the final result, such as: geographical location, dwelling place (city / country), descent (indigenous / immigrant), social status, culture, religion, race, sex and age of the bilingual group. The final dominance of one of the languages is the outcome of all these factors (BEDNARCZUK 1995: 76 = 2000: 103).

The disappearing language leaves its mark on the dominant one's vocabulary (often on the morphology and phonetics as well). Depending on which of the languages is absorbed (the one of the immigrants or the autochthons), this mark is called a superstrate or a substrate, respectively (BARTOLI 1939: 59–65). If the immigrants' language prevails, the language of the original population becomes a **substrate** (a term by G. PARIS: 1882); if the autochthons' language gains dominance, the language of the immigrant population becomes a **superstrate** (a term by Walther van WARTBURG 1950: 155–156). A case whereby none of the languages dominates the other is possible as well (linguistic areas and other equal status communities). Here we may speak of a phenomenon known as the **adstrate** (a term by M. VALKHOFF 1932).

The concepts of both the substrate and the superstrate are inextricably linked with language contact (BARTOLI 1939), especially with the phenomenon of bilingualism. With the emergence of bilingualism, infiltration occurs, along with manifold calques and hybrid forms, which may expand extensively enough to make it legitimate to speak of the two languages' shared vocabulary. This, in turn, makes evident the advanced process of convergence (coming together) of the two languages.

A mixing of two populations strengthens the tendency for borrowings to occur, i.e. the filling of lexical gaps in the languages' semantic systems. While no significant difference between the substrate and the superstrate is visible as far as infiltration is concerned, a great quantitative difference is apparent as regards borrowings. In the case of the substrate, the borrowings usually include a great number of toponyms, hydronyms etc., and also frequently involve an extensive vocabulary referring to the local natural environment and physiography. In the case of the superstrate, however, the number of borrowings is substantially smaller. The smaller the socio-cultural differences between the two ethnic groups, the fewer borrowings will take place. In rare cases, it is possible for no superstratal borrowings to occur at all.

Therefore, a foreign (or etymologically unclear) toponymy or hydronymy is ordinarily the main criterion to decide whether or not an ethnic substrate used to exist in a given area. As far as Proto-Germanic is concerned, the matter is in fact quite obscure, for we are not able to answer the question if a foreign toponymy had existed in the area where the Germanic people originated (southern Scandinavia, Jutland and north-west Germany). Still, L. BEDNARCZUK (1987: 47–48) notices that the scholars' attention has been drawn primarily towards the (purportedly!) pre-Indo-European toponymy of today's Netherlands and north-west Germany. According to A. SCHERER (1965: 10–11), some of those toponyms correspond to ones found in the Alps (e.g. *Balw-*) and in the Mediterranean basin (e.g. *Alist-*, *Gand-*, *Ped-*), or even in the language of the Basques (e.g. *Itter* : Basque *iturri* 'spring'). The value of these comparisons remains a matter of dispute, hence it cannot be denied that G. NEUMANN'S (1971: 89–97) sceptical view of the subject is based on more reliable data.

It happens sometimes that a number of different ethnic groups settle a particular area one after the other, inheriting from the previous ones a toponymy that is dual in nature (i.e. both substratal and superstratal), to which they add their own. As a result of this process, a remarkably diverse toponymy comes into being, and it is virtually impossible to distinguish layers that could be assigned to particular ethnic groups (which are frequently only known by their ethnic names). This problem is especially conspicuous in the ancient Balkan, where countless ethnic group had intermixed and hence the stratification of the toponymy is virtually unrecoverable¹².

The richness of the Balkan toponymy is easy to explain bearing in mind that the peninsula was the most convenient starting point for invading Europe from

¹² Therefore, the Balkan toponymy is, in fact, rendered useless as a source for reconstructing the extinct Paleo-Balkan languages. Unfortunately, though, this fact is usually disregarded, and the toponymy of uncertain (or at least ambiguous) ethnic origin – not to mention the doubts concerning etymologizing names of places and water bodies – is often used as a tool to resolve basic linguistic issues.

the south. If we realise that the Jutland peninsula was a similar gateway in the north, we may conclude that the Proto-Germanic toponymy might resemble the Balkan one. The issue may be further clarified if we accept the theory, distinguishing three ethnic strata of Scandinavia:

1. Pre-Indo-European,
2. Indo-European Pre-Germanic,
3. Proto-Germanic.

The problem of Proto-Germanic toponymy is, therefore, a complex issue which requires separate treatment.

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