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Liljana Mitkovska

AUE-FON University, Skopje, North Macedonia

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4447-4289>

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Liljana Mitkovska, Palmiro Toljati 27, Skopje, North Macedonia.

Email: liljana.mitkovska@fon.edu.mk;
liljana55@yahoo.com

Linguistic Interactions: The Influence of English on Macedonian

Liljana Mitkovska

Abstract

This paper explores the influence of English on Macedonian from a contact linguistics perspective. In language contact situations, linguistic borrowing becomes a common process. The goal of this research is to explore the mechanisms of borrowing from English as Macedonian speakers are increasingly exposed to this language driven by globalization and technological advancement. The analysis focuses on linguistic interactions at both the lexical and morphosyntactic levels. It begins by examining material and pattern borrowing, highlighting how English terms and patterns have been integrated into Macedonian vocabulary. The discussion then turns to the morphosyntactic level, providing a brief overview of how English has influenced Macedonian grammar. The paper concludes with remarks on possible strategies for confining borrowing within reasonable limits in order to ensure the future integrity of the Macedonian language.

Keywords: language contact, contact linguistics, borrowing, source language, globalization

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Introduction

Languages influence one another when they come in contact with certain geo-political circumstances. Language contact occurs when some members of one linguistic community can understand and use the language of another community, that is if there is some degree of bilingualism. Language processes typical for such situations, e.g., contact-induced language change, are the main topics of Contact linguistics, a field that has been a subject of scholarly inquiry since the early 20th century. However, it wasn't until the publication of Uriel Weinreich's seminal work *Languages in Contact* in 1953 that the field started significant development. Weinreich's groundbreaking book had a crucial impact on the advancement of contact linguistics, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding how languages interact and change when they come into contact with one another. Since then, contact linguistics has continued to evolve, drawing on insights from various disciplines such as sociolinguistics, historical linguistics, and anthropology to explore the complex dynamics of language contact and its effects on linguistic structure, variation, and development.

In situations of language contact, linguistic borrowing becomes a common process, where a source language, known as donor language, serves as a model for the borrowing language, i.e. recipient language (Haspelmath, 2008, p. 45). The amount of linguistic transfer in these situations is influenced by various factors, including the duration and intensity of the contact between the communities, the cultural influence exerted by the more prestigious community, and the attitudes and policies of the receiving community, such as linguistic purism promoted by institutions (Thomason, 2001). Borrowing typically happens for two main reasons: the need to express new concepts or terms that do not exist in the recipient language, and the desire to gain prestige, as using terms from a prestigious language can make speakers appear more educated or fashionable. Borrowing for structural reasons or for avoiding taboos or homonymy is much rarer.¹

Globalization has positioned English as a lingua franca, making it widely spoken and understood across various regions, including Macedonia. According to Matras (2013), this increased prominence of English is further strengthened by enhanced communication and mobility, as well as the rise of English-medium education, which fosters more intense contact with the language. The liberalization

1 See the discussion on reasons for language borrowing in Haspelmath (2009, pp. 46-50).

and expansion of public media in our country have also played a significant role in spreading English. Technological advancements in communication have changed the mode of interaction, blurring traditional distinctions between written and spoken language, formal and colloquial speech, and dialectal and standard forms (Matras, 2013). Accordingly, the most intensely affected areas of the Macedonian language by this linguistic influence include the entertainment sphere—such as music, sports, and movies—along with computer technologies and the Internet (Gjurkova, 2008). Additionally, fashion, beauty care, the economy, business communication, the socio-political sphere, advertising, and casual conversation among young people are heavily influenced by English (Makarjioska, 2012).

Borrowing is characterized by specific features in all these areas, and an in-depth analysis would require a more extensive study, which is beyond the scope of this paper. The current study focuses more on the key aspects of language transfer from English into Macedonian. Two main types of linguistic borrowing are distinguished: (1) **material (matter) borrowing**, which involves adopting language forms, typically lexical items while phonological and morphological forms are rarely incorporated; and (2) **structural (pattern) borrowing**, which entails replicating foreign models using domestic materials, including word-formation patterns or morpho-syntactic structures (Heine & Kuteva, 2008). The paper first discusses material and pattern borrowing at the lexical level, followed by a brief overview of influences at the morphosyntactic level, and finishes with some concluding remarks.

Lexical borrowing from English into Macedonian

Matter borrowing at the lexical level

Lexical borrowing from English into Macedonian primarily occurs through matter borrowing, where new terms and concepts are adopted as loanwords, especially when there is no exact word for the concept in Macedonian. Examples of such loanwords include mainly names for newly invented technological items and their parts, such as монитор (monitor), борд (board), инвертор (inverter). There is also a considerable number of abstract notions related to processes that are relatively new for the Macedonian community, including бенчмарк (benchmark), бреинсторминг (brainstorming), and физибилити (feasibility), among others. The Macedonian speech community is less likely to accept meaning extensions of near-equivalent Macedonian words, such as using плувче (mouse) for a ‘com-

puter mouse' or прилог (attachment) for an 'email attachment'. In some cases, there are possible Macedonian equivalents, but these may be more complex. Thus преферира (prefer) has been adopted and is often used instead of сака повеќе (like more), or дедлајн (deadline) instead of краен рок (final term). Alternatively, the equivalents may not fully capture the concept. For instance, драфт (draft) has been widely adopted because the near-equivalent нацрт (outline) does not fully capture the meaning of 'preliminary version', but usually refers to a plan. It is also heavily associated with bureaucratic language. The term бекграунд (background) has also become popular because there are two corresponding terms in Macedonian, namely позадина (physical background) and историјат (history, previous events), but there is no word that covers the full meaning of 'previous conditions/information about something that helps people understand it' or 'a person's education, experience, and social circumstances'. For some terms related to modern technological inventions, the proposed Macedonian lexical coinages are not readily accepted, so many people prefer даунлодира (download) to симнува (take something down) and сурфа (surf) to пребарува на интернет (browse the internet). The intensity of borrowing increases as more people in Macedonia become proficient in English. People are more likely to accept English terms if they understand their meaning. However, if they are not familiar with these terms, they may reject them or assign different meanings, which may lead to semantic divergence from the original, as noted by Lazarova-Nikovska and Kardaleska (2011) in their research.

In addition to borrowing terms for new concepts, Macedonian also adopts English loanwords for already existing concepts, even when there are exact equivalents in Macedonian. Examples include ивент (event) for настан, лимит (limit) for граница or ограничување, линк (link) for врска, принтер (printer) for печатар, се конектира (connect) for се поврзува, сервис (service) for услуга, and менаџмент (management) for управување, to mention just a few of the plethora of such words. People often adopt these foreign words due to reasons of prestige, social pressure, and attitude. As Haspelmath (2009) notes, "The way we talk (or write) is not only determined by the ideas we want to get across, but also by the impression we want to convey on others, and by the kind of social identity that we want to be associated with," (p.48). Other factors include convenience and habit, as it can be easier to use an English term if both interlocutors understand it. Finally, connotation or implication may play a crucial role: the English term is preferred if it carries terminological value and associations that the Macedonian equivalent does not. This trend of borrowing continues to expand as the use of English among Macedonians increases at all levels.

Pattern borrowing at the lexical level

In some cases, the Macedonian lexical patterns may be affected by the English model. Two main processes could be distinguished: meaning extension and copying word formation patterns (known as *calques*). Meaning extension involves the addition of a new shade of meaning to the native term so that it is applied to new phenomena parallel to those in the native culture (Mitkovska, 2008). For instance, the meaning of the term студент (student) has been extended from pertaining just to ‘university student’ to also meaning ‘high school student.’ The term нервозен (nervous), which originally just meant ‘angry,’ is now used to mean “anxious,” as well, following the use of *nervous* in English. The term случај (case) is used to include ‘legal case,’ as well as *case* in general. Nowadays, we increasingly encounter криминално право (criminal law) instead of кривично право, модерен (modern) to mean ‘contemporary’ besides ‘fashionable,’ легитимира (legitimate) to mean ‘gives the right’ instead of only ‘ask for an identification’, and фаворит (favorite) to mean ‘preferred’ apart from ‘most likely to win.’

There are two possibilities in such extensions: in some cases, both the old and new meanings exist in the donor language, such as ‘student,’ which refers to both high school and university levels, or ‘case,’ referring to both legal and general contexts. The Macedonian term had only one of those meanings, which motivated the adoption of the other one for the same form. In other instances, the existing Macedonian meaning does not fully align with the English term, such as модерен (modern) meaning ‘fashionable’ rather than ‘contemporary,’ or нервозен (nervous) meaning ‘angry’ rather than ‘anxious’. The motivation for the extension of the meaning of the Macedonian word was the formal association. Lexical items regularly acquire new but related meanings even without contact. Therefore, these meaning extensions often sound natural and are not perceived as borrowings, easily integrating into the language.

Calques are formed through the literal translation of combinations from the donor language into the recipient language, influencing compounding, collocations, and phraseological expressions. A typical example of calquing in Macedonian is the adoption of the endocentric noun-noun (NN) compound pattern, where the first noun modifies the second one (Gjurkova, 2008; Mitkovska, 2008). While this pattern is quite common in English, it plays a marginal role in Macedonian. This pattern has entered Macedonian through various means, including direct translations such as арт дизајнер (art designer) and мејк-ап артист (make-up artist), as well as older examples like џез оркестар (jazz orchestra) and рок група

(rock group). Additionally, loanblends (which combine an English word with a Macedonian equivalent of the second noun) such as бизнис средба (business meeting), видео игри (video games), and поп култура (pop culture) are becoming more common. Company names also reflect this pattern, with examples like Скопје дизајн (Skopje Design) and Ивеа Констракшн (Ivea Construction). Traditionally, Macedonian uses prepositional phrases or adjective-noun combinations to express 'modifier + noun' relations, such as храна за мачки (lit. food for cats, cat food), музичко училиште (music school), and филмска индустрија (film industry). Macedonian NN compounds are typically appositional, like жена-борец (woman-fighter), but there are Turkish loanwords like саат-кула (clock tower), or borrowings from other languages, e.g., кино сала (cinema hall). An important factor that facilitates the adoption of the English pattern is the existence of a transitional zone between endocentric and appositional compounds, where some compounds can be interpreted in multiple ways, as noted by Vakareliyska (2013). For instance, предлог-закон (proposal-law) can mean both a 'proposal that is a law' (an appositional compound) and a 'proposal for a law' (an endocentric compound). Additionally, 'abbreviation + noun' constructions, such as ЈУ-простори (Yugoslav spaces), can be interpreted as adjectival phrases (југословенски простори).² These linguistic features make the English NN compound pattern sound familiar and natural for Macedonian speakers.

Collocations with English patterns are increasingly appearing in Macedonian, resulting in combinations of words that are unusual in the native context. For instance, the English phrase 'to make money' translates directly to прави пари in Macedonian, although the more traditional phrase is заработува пари (earn money). Similarly, 'not to make a difference' becomes не ми прави разлика, whereas the conventional expression is сè едно ми е (it is all the same to me), and 'to make a deal' translates to прави дил instead of the already existing Macedonian expression склучи сделка (lit. contract a deal). Another example is 'to do homework,' which is directly translated as прави домашна работа, although the correct Macedonian phrase is пишува домашна работа (write homework). Furthermore, the English verb-preposition combinations are also copied, where there is no correspondence. For instance, 'is interested in' is rendered as се интересира во, while the proper Macedonian equivalent is се интересира за. These English-inspired collocations are becoming more common as English continues to exert its influence on Macedo-

2 See more on this type of compounds in Mitkovska (2011).

nian, demonstrating how direct translations from English can sometimes disrupt the natural flow of the Macedonian language.

Phraseological expressions from English are also making their way into Macedonian through word-for-word translations. Examples include *имајте убав ден* (have a nice day), which traditionally would be *(ви посакувам) убав ден* (I wish you a nice day), *на крајот на денот* (at the end of the day), typically expressed as *на крајот на краиштата* (lit. at the end of ends), and *скрши нога* (break a leg), for which the Macedonian equivalent is *со среќа* (good luck). These direct translations illustrate the strong cultural influence of English on Macedonian. Otherwise, they would make no sense for a Macedonian speaker, sounding rather strange and some even offensive (*скрши нога*, for instance).

Additionally, reduplication, where a Macedonian word is paired with an English word of the same meaning, is also encountered. In the following examples, the English word is redundant and does not appear to add any new information: *впечатоци и импресии* (impressions), *постојано и перманентно* (constant and permanent), *образуван и едуциран* (educated and learned), *линковска врска* (link connection). However, this phenomenon suggests that speakers perceive the English term as more intense and use it to reinforce the Macedonian equivalent, thereby enhancing the overall impression.

Explaining the process of lexical borrowing

Lexical borrowing typically progresses through several phases, as described by Haspelmath (2009, pp. 40-43). The initial phase is characterized by **innovation** or **nonce borrowing**, where the borrowed word is perceived as foreign and may not structurally fit into the recipient language or is relatively rare, used only in limited situations. In Macedonian, these nonce borrowings often enter through translations in journalistic, administrative, or professional contexts, as well as through the mass media, which frequently rely on international sources. Additionally, code-switching among bilinguals can lead to the insertion of English sequences into Macedonian speech, with regularly inserted expressions eventually becoming nonce borrowings.

The next phase involves **adaptation**, during which the borrowed words undergo phonological, morpho-syntactic, and semantic adjustments to align with the Macedonian linguistic system (Gjurkova, 2008). This regularly involves adjustment of pronunciation and assignment of gender and articles for nouns and adjectives (*принтер-от* 'the printer,' *принтер-и-те* 'the printers'), and aspect and endings re-

lated to tense and person for verbs (*like* is adopted as *лајќне* perfective verb and *лајќува* imperfective; *лајќнав* – Aorist, 1sg, *лајќуваше* – Imperfect, 2/3sg). Exceptionally, some lexical items may be used without morphological adjustment, as for example the adjectives *супер* ‘super’ and *тренди* ‘trendy,’ among others. They get no gender or articles, but they do not feel unusual. For instance, in *Промените се супер* ‘The changes are super,’ the noun is in the plural, and the adjective in Macedonian should get a plural marker, but it is missing here. Equally, we encounter such adjectives unchanged in the noun phrase in front of the noun. In the following examples, the adjective is in the same form both with a plural noun, *тренди модели* ‘trendy patterns,’ and with a singular noun, *тренди изглед* ‘trendy look.’ It is usually considered that such words have not been fully adopted, but they may remain in that state for a long time due to some structural constraints.

The final phase is **integration**, where the borrowed word becomes fully integrated into the recipient language system. This is a slow process and happens gradually. However, determining which nonce borrowings will ultimately remain integrated poses a challenge, as it depends on various factors, including frequency of usage, sociolinguistic context, and language policies.

English influence at the morpho-syntactic level

Structural contact-induced-language change typically occurs in situations of prolonged and/or intense contact between languages. The reasons for structural changes are multifaceted, with borrowing often serving as just one factor among many, sometimes merely accelerating an ongoing process. In structural borrowing, a pattern from the donor language is copied onto forms in the recipient language that are associated with the structure of the donor language as a result of some degree of functional overlap. Where there is no complete alignment between the two languages, bilinguals tend to adopt the English pattern to bring them closer together. Structural borrowing from English into Macedonian may not be immediately evident and has not received extensive study or discussion. Nevertheless, some observations have been made, and a few will be briefly discussed in this section. Further in-depth research is warranted in this area.

The influence of English on the Macedonian syntactic structure can be detected in the increased use of subject pronouns in Macedonian. Unlike English, Macedonian verbs are inflected for person, and the pronoun is typically used for emphasis and contrast. While the use of subject pronouns in Macedonian is not grammatically in-

correct, it may sound unusual, particularly to monolingual speakers. A comparison of texts from the 20th century with those from the last 10 to 15 years may provide a more precise picture of the trends in this respect in the Macedonian language.

Another example is the rapid diffusion of the *ima*-perfect tense from a dialectal peculiarity to a feature of both colloquial and more formal Macedonian: Таа има напишано три книги. ‘She has written three books. This innovation, atypical in Slavic languages, first emerged under Aromanian influence in the South-West Macedonian dialects, probably during the 17th century.³ Its gradual dissemination to the North and East regions occurred for various reasons. However, its association with the English Present Perfect, which shares formal and functional similarities, has accelerated its spread over the past 30 years, making it commonplace across all spheres of Macedonian life. This phenomenon highlights the influence of English, subtly shaping linguistic evolution through structural borrowing.

English and Macedonian possessive pronouns exhibit different scopes of usage, with English employing them more widely and frequently. In Macedonian, however, there are more possibilities to express possessive relations. Besides possessive pronouns, various other constructions are employed for that purpose. For instance, the English sentence ‘His sister is a doctor’ typically translates to ‘Сестра му е лекар’ in Macedonian, where the possessive relation is expressed through the dative clitic му (to him), used adnominally. Similarly, ‘He closed his eyes’ corresponds to ‘Ти затвори очите’ in Macedonian, where the possessive relation is not explicitly marked but is implied by the reflexive relation between the subject referent and the object (a body part). Additionally, the English ‘They tore my book’ can be translated as ‘Ми ја скинаа книгата’ in Macedonian, where the dative pronoun ми (to me) is employed adverbally, implying a possessive relation between the dative experiencer and the affected direct object (the book).

The increased usage of possessive pronouns in Macedonian constructions like these can be attributed to the influence of English. In these attested sentences “Научил да ја држи четката со својата уста” (learned to hold the brush with his own mouth) and “Дали вие имате проблеми со вашата тироидна жлезда?” (Do you have problems with your thyroid gland?) The use of the possessive pronoun is superfluous, and they sound awkward, as such use implies special emphases, which

3 According to Koneski (1986, p. 201) the first attested forms in written documents date back to the 18th century.

is out of place here.⁴ These examples demonstrate the adaptation and integration of possessive pronoun usage in Macedonian influenced by English structures. However, in-depth empirical research is needed to determine the specificities of these contact-induced changes.

Pluralization of abstract nouns is a linguistic phenomenon relatively unusual in Macedonian but influenced by English usage patterns, it occurs more often now. In English, abstract nouns are commonly pluralized to denote various instances or manifestations of the concept. This influence can be observed in Macedonian translations, where abstract nouns are occasionally pluralized to convey similar nuances. For example, слободи (freedoms) is used in the translation of “Меѓународниот извештај за верски слободи” (The International Report on Religious Freedoms), emphasizing the multiple aspects or instances of freedom within the context. Similarly, практики (practices) is employed in “Искуство и практики на Град Скопје” (The experience and practices of the City of Skopje), indicating various practices or methodologies adopted by the city. Additionally, однесувања (behaviors) is utilized in ‘однесувања поврзани со здравјето на децата’ (behaviors related to children’s health), highlighting different behaviors associated with children’s health. As the pluralization of abstract nouns is not standard practice in Macedonian, these instances demonstrate the influence of English language structures and usage patterns on Macedonian translations, reflecting a cross-linguistic borrowing phenomenon.

Concluding remarks

The question of whether the dominance of the English language poses a threat to national languages and cultures is a topic of ongoing debate. On one hand, some argue that English is indispensable for the integration and prosperity of a nation, particularly in today’s globalized world where English serves as a lingua franca for communication in various fields. However, others view the increasing influence of English as a potential danger to linguistic and cultural identity.⁵ Many Macedonian linguists oppose the adoption of English forms and patterns (Gruevska-Madžovska, 2008; Karapejovski, 2011; Makarijiska, 2012; Toevski, 2015). Suggestions for

4 In the second sentence there is also an unnecessary subject pronoun *вие* (you), testifying the previously mentioned influence of English in the overuse of subject pronouns.

5 See for instance Matras (2013) for an alternative contact linguistics perspective.

protection measures include the establishment of translation equivalents for English loanwords and the creation of national councils or institutions dedicated to the protection and development of the native language, akin to the model implemented in France.

In Macedonia, efforts have been made through legislation such as the Law for the Use of the Macedonian Language, as well as the establishment of the Council for the Macedonian Language. However, it is recognized that language protection cannot be enforced solely through legal regulations. The new socio-economic, technological, and linguistic circumstances require different ways of communication. Matras (2013, p. 11) proposes “an approach to contact linguistics that regards languages less as static systems, and more as dynamic repertoires, and speakers not just as followers of social norms, but as creative contributors to the shape of linguistic structures and routines.”

Ultimately, the preservation of a language depends on the language community itself, while institutions could provide guidance and support. Criticism and abuse of linguistic borrowing can often lead to resistance, particularly if the language community feels its linguistic choices are being unfairly restricted or controlled. On the other hand, fostering awareness and a sense of responsibility within the community is essential for ensuring the language’s stable development. The authorities and language specialists should work together to identify the needs and find proper methods to promote a shared understanding of why preserving certain linguistic elements is important and develop a collective sense of pride and commitment to their language. A balanced and informed approach, rather than one based on criticism, is more likely to inspire genuine and efficient resistance to uncontrolled language borrowing and ensure the continued vitality of the language.

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