Ar Journalioù, Ar Radio, hag An Tele: French Lexical Influences on Breton
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*The Annual Proceedings of the Berkeley Linguistics Society* is published online via eLanguage, the Linguistic Society of America's digital publishing platform.
1.0. Lexical borrowing as an outcome of language contact is a phenomenon so well documented that it needs little further introduction here (cf. Deroy 1956, Haugen 1950, Weinreich 1953). Most languages take in vocabulary from neighbors (and non-neighbors, for that matter) to a greater or lesser extent. 1 Breton, the P-Celtic language spoken in Brittany (western France), is no exception. French has been the language exerting the most obvious lexical influence on Breton, at least since the 12th c. (the beginning of the era of Middle Breton), though from the 1st through the 5th c. A.D., Latin had "lent" 600-700 words to the Brythonic languages of the British Isles (Loth 1892), many of which the Bretons brought with them at the time of their emigration to Brittany between the 4th and 6th c. Since that time Breton has, unlike its sister Celtic languages, been in continuous contact with one or more representatives of the Romance family.

There is little tangible remaining of Old Breton (8th-11th c.); the Viking invasions in the 9th-10 c. forced the monks and other literati to flee, taking their documents with them. However, some glosses have survived, and a large number of proper names and toponyms in cartularies of the epoch (Loth 1907). It is not, then, until Middle Breton that texts in the language itself begin to appear, and these reveal a strong lexical influence from French. Piette is of the opinion that "Although Middle Breton retained a substantial number of native words that were subsequently lost by the Modern Breton dialects..., it has also borrowed several thousand French words, for many of which native synonyms were extant" (1973:203). The following passage—a fragment of a text written by Dom Michel Le Nobletz in 1641, just at the end of the period of Middle Breton—clearly demonstrates the nature of this borrowing:

A enep a lubricite 2
Da guenta, techet eus ar campagnonez hac auspen ar re familiariet, peheni a zo occasion dar vicc man. Goudeze, [guitaat] pellaat diouz ar re a ro gual exemple dom hac on laqua en occasion eus ar pechet ze. An drede, guitaat an oisivete hac vacqui ato en un exercise honest. Ar pevare, ne vagua quet ar horf re delicat, egon caret an abstinence, principalamant eus ar guin re cre...An huevet, quemeret ur mortification benak principalamant a pa zui un tentation vras.

This is the Breton of an educated man who would have known French and Latin in addition to his native Breton; in his polyglottism he would have been quite unlike the monolingual Breton speakers to whom he preached. Thus, it is uncertain to what extent such French loans would have been employed on a daily basis by the Breton masses. Piette believes that even for clerics, such as Le Nobletz, many of these borrowings would have been "...Luxuslehnwörter or even temporary borrow-
ings with no real existence in the current language" (1973:205). This strikes me as plausible, and is supported by the observation that all but 3 or 4 of the French loans underlined in the quoted passage do not give the impression of being morphologically (or phonologically) adapted to Breton. Moreover, inasmuch as the clergy received their religious training in Latin and were literate in French, it is not hard to imagine how words from these "high" languages would have been transferred to their native vernacular, perhaps even with an eye to "upgrading" it.3

Whatever the intentions of Middle Breton clerics and other writers of the time who shared a visible penchant for French, they were not appreciated by Bretonophiles of the 19th c. Specifically, starting with J.F.M.A. Le Gonidec ("The Father of True Breton"), the era of Great Expurgations was launched. Through this man's reforms Breton was cleansed of contaminating French (and Latin) elements; and most writers succeeding Le Gonidec continued the crusade against the "bastardization" of Breton. Ironically, this purification campaign began to overlap chronologically with the Frenchification of a steadily increasing portion of the Breton population. Compulsory education, military conscription, migration outside of Brittany for work (often to Paris), the development of roads and railways were all late 19th-c. changes that dramatically accelerated the acquisition of French by Bretons (for details, see Timm 1973). Knowledge of French was, by the end of WW I, widespread, particularly among the younger generations. By the end of WW II, the great majority of Bretons would be bilingual. As a result, the French influence on Breton that is observable today reflects the fact that French has become an essential part of people's daily lives. Many bretons de naissance (those having Breton as their first language) feel, by adulthood, more comfortable in French. This is due in no small measure to the fact that Breton has never been allowed into the national educational system: schoolchildren are introduced to all of the usual academic fields via French; they learn to compute, to read, to discuss politics in French. Indeed, the whole world is viewed through the French lens; small wonder that the perspective offered should be reflected in Breton.

2.0. The following passage, extracted from a current popular political journal (the only one written entirely in Breton) illustrates aptly the use of French-derived lexemes in colloquial speech. Most of the loanwords appearing here are considered part of standard Breton—they are "received" in that they have been entered into one of the most influential dictionaries of the language (Hémon 1973).4 Such loans have been underlined in the text below; "non-received" loans are in caps.

O'ch ober un tamm c'hwenañ bar jardin--kãer ar saladenn, an ognon hag ar chalotes, ha diwanñ 'ra ar PATO, med al louseier fall iwe....Ha gweled a ran an amesen o vont trema 'r bourk, tud leizh an OTOIOU, ar vamm-gozh hag ar voer-eb ban tu adreñv....An dewezhiôu araoq ar VOT eo bet an "AVOKADED KAMPAGN" oc'h ober un tamm kentel pe LESSON d'ar merc'hed kozh. "O ya, eme-hê, med Fanch pe Job pe Pier
From the point of view of a linguistic analysis of the borrowings observable in this passage, there are several things to be said: (1) most of the nouns and verbs show some measure of linguistic adaptation to Breton--i.e., they do not appear to be so lightly moored to the syntax as do most of the Gallicisms in the Middle Breton text cited above; this is as true of the non-received loans as of the received ones. For example, we see the reshaping of Fr. salade as Br. saladenn, with the commonly occurring -enn noun formative of Breton, and shallot reshaped as chalotes, with -es, a feminine nominizer; the -(i)ou in otoioù is the most usual noun pluralizer; -ed in avokaded (< avocat) is another allomorph of the noun plural morpheme, usually indicating animateness. Verb infinitives in Breton may occur freely without special markers--thus, changer has come into Breton simply as chanch /sàañ/-or they may be marked with -iñ or -añ, as in votinñ < voter, and diskourajinñ < décourager. The latter verb is more properly a loanblend, since the Breton privative prefix dis- has replaced its French analogue dé-. This verb further displays its incorporation into the morphosyntax of the phrase in the initial consonant mutation following the leniting trigger element da 'to' (i.e., base d- > z-). (2) The last two sentences quoted illustrate syntactic calques: Med an dra-se 'gerzh ket reflects the Fr. Cette chose là ne marche pas and Un dra bennag zo ban aer translates Il y a quelque chose dans l'air. Such loan translations are, in my experience with Breton speakers, very common; here they suggest the bilingualism of the writer and, perhaps, his French dominance. (3) A semantic analysis of the borrowings shows a reliance on French terms for French concepts: e.g., the garden and much of its yield--lettuce (saladenn), shallots, onions--were all introduced into the peninsula by the French. (The potato, on the other hand, came in from Great Britain in the 18th c., and was adopted as pato or patatez [the latter being the received form] in the northern part of Brittany. Elsewhere it was adopted as avalou douar, a calque on Fr. pommes de terre--see Falc'hun 1963:287.) The borrowing lesson < leçon is used here along with the Breton word in "kentel pe lesson", perhaps to signal a shift to the French modus operandi prior to elections: i.e., "campaign advocates" are sent around to "instruct" the little old ladies (ar merc'hed kozh) how to vote. Le vote came in, of course, with the advent of French democracy; this is the noun used also in Breton (ar vot is the folk version, at any rate, votadenn being the received borrowing); the associated verb is votin. 

Avokaded kampagn < avocats de campagne is another notion linked to French electoral politics. Finally, for chanch < changer, it is difficult to think of a semantic justification for this borrowing, since Breton has kemmean to express this notion. Yet chanch has probably been in the spoken language for a fairly long time; it remains an unreceived loan. By contrast, the phonetically similar noun
chains < chance is a received borrowing, and documented in the written language since 1464 (Hémon 1980, rann 6:345).

For the Breton speaker also fluent in French, the possibilities for dipping into the French lexicon are, in theory, limitless. Yet this opportunity is not exploited and is not likely to be just as long as bretons de naissance remain bicultural. That is, it seems to me that one prominent reason that bilingual bretonnant(e)s draw on French lexemes in speaking Breton is to refer or allude to matters relating to French, and by extension, to European society and culture; the borrowings provide a way of talking about aspects of modern life without necessitating a shift to the French language. One might even see in such lexical adaptation a key to the survival of this language whose future is uncertain (cf. Timm 1980). In short, purists may end up throwing the baby out with the bath water if they persist in attempting to stamp out the French loans.

In my work on the Breton spoken in and around Carhaix, an interior town in Lower Brittany, I have recorded about 125 non-received French loanwords (and there are surely more). The borrowings fall into three major form classes, in the following proportions: (1) nouns, 45.6%; (2) adjectives, 23.2%; (3) verbs, 19.2%; an additional 8.8% of the loans are adverbs, and 3.2% are miscellaneous (1 pronoun, 1 conjunction, 1 negativizer, 1 exclamation). As has been reported in other language contact studies (e.g., Haugen 1950; Shipley 1962; Sjoestedt 1928; Spicer 1943), nouns are the most well represented class of loanwords. The semantic domains they cover are more or less those one expects to encounter in a contact situation in which an essentially rural and fishing people have been introduced to the more variegated economy and material culture of the impinging and superordinate group (cf. Sjoestedt 1928 for a comparable inventory of English loanwords in rural Irish): machinery and appliances; non-indigenous household items, food, and clothing; non-traditional jobs and commercial activities; politics (see 3.0. for the itemization). Verbs and adjectives are more difficult to categorize, except that a French verb radical is likely to be adopted in connection with actions relating to non-traditional technology or modernization: thus, /telefonə/ < téléphoner, /kon'dwiR/ < conduire, /endystRiə'lizə/ < industrialiser, /pro'testi/ < protester, etc. Other French verbs seem to be drawn into the Breton lexicon due to their high saliency and/or idiomaticity in French--e.g., /faut/ > /fot/, /se occuper > /nom'kypə/, /se contener > /nom'gə'tatə/, /se tromper > /nom'dRompə/.

The latter explanation may also help account for many of the French-derived adjectives, along with the suggestion that such adjectives--almost all of which have a native Breton equivalent--may capture a nuance of difference in meaning: e.g., /ɛnte'resən/ < interessant is more polysemous than either native hoalus or dudius, which offer more the sense of 'engaging, diverting, charming'.

3.0. In this last section I will present the non-standard loanwords that I have collected, but first a few words are in order about the phonological and morphological adaptations that take place in ushering the French roots into Breton. There are sufficient similarities between the consonant and (monophthongal) vowel inventories, as well
as the phonotactics of the two languages, that great phonological
adjustments are rarely called for. However, one salient feature of
Breton not shared by French is the devoicing of pre-pause voiced
obstruents; this pattern is seen in the French borrowings. Another
pattern found in the dialect of which the Breton of Carhaix is a
part is penultimate-syllable word stress; this is usually, though
not always (cf. Group I below), heard in the French loans. Nasal
vowels in the dialect are ordinarily stressed; perhaps as a re-
sult French loans ending in a nasal vowel are reshaped as /Vn/
when the stress falls on some other syllable. Finally, all the
Breton dialects share with the other Celtic languages a system of
initial consonant mutations--i.e., a morphophonemic process that
marks, inter alia, gender and some categories of possession; French
borrowings beginning with a mutable consonant are subject to the
same operations as native words.

In the following classification, the loanwords are arranged by
type of phonological adaptation (if any) involved and by morpheme
class. For the former dimension, Roman numeral I = no phonological
change (unadapted loans); II = advancement of stress to the penult
(and no other change); III = ultima (French-type) stress placement,
but with other phonological changes; IV = advancement of stress to
the penult and other phonological adjustments; V = deletion of
syllables from the French model.

The lexemes illustrated are base forms; the nouns may be in-
flected for plural (except for a few, like /va'kasu/ 'vacances',
included as plurals for which I have no singular); and the
verbs may be conjugated or used as participles (space does not per-
mit a detailed exposition here). Since only the base forms are ex-
emplified, the operation of the mutations is not apparent.

I. Nouns: /e'sãs/ 'essence', /fak'tõR/ 'facteur', /flõR/ 'fleur',
/glìs'twar/ 'glisser', /pãs'mã/ 'pansement', /pryn/ 'prune',
/Rest u'Ros/ 'restaurant', /Ryt/ 'route', /vo'lo/ 'volant'.
Adjectives: /ku'Ra'/ 'courant', /du/ 'doux', /dRol/ 'drôle'.
Verb: /fo/ (~/fot/) 'faut'.
Adverb: /apôpRè/ 'à peu près'.
Conjunction: /kaR/ (~/ka/) 'car'.

II. Nouns: /'baskyl/ 'bascule', /'bato/ 'bateau', /'kampã/ 'campagne', /'drapo/ 'drapeau', /'abi/ 'habilles', /'ëpo/ 'impôt',
/'mãs'na/ 'lave/ 'machine à laver', /'miz êR/ 'misère', /'mylot/ 'mul-
lot', /'oto/ 'auto', /'pano/ 'panneau', /'s ektõR/ 'secteur'.
Exclamation: /'mëRsi/ 'Merci!'

III. Nouns: /'benedik'sin/ 'bénédiction', /frâs'was/ 'Françoise',
/'ɡatɔ/ 'gateau', /'gout/ 'gout', /'sindi'kat/ 'syndicat'.
Adjectives: /fë'nef/ 'fainéant', /'y mit/ 'humide', /myt/
/'muette', /'siRiv/ 'sérieux'.
Adverbs: /zêRti'na/ 'certainement', /'yis/ 'juste',
/pãR'yt/ 'partout', /syR'yt/ 'surtout'.
Verb Negativizer: /ne'pas/ 'ne pas'.

IV. Nouns: /ak'sidën/ 'accident', /'byfî/ 'buffet',
/'sãR'pãkə/ 'charpentier', /'kolêRëtën/ 'collerette',
/kyvë'Rtyëtën/ 'couverture', /'domiš/ 'dommage', /e'talon/'
'étalon', 'jambon', 'lapin', "l'oisan", 'leçon', "magazine", 'ménage', 'pré-sent', 'profit', 'promenade', 'raison', 'reparation', 'sien', 'tapis', 'tourment', 'tranche', 'vasselles', 'vacances', 'veil'.

Adjectives: 'commode', 'content', 'curieux', 'difficil', 'embêtant', 'intéressant', 'mech', 'néc', 'pres-sé', 'solide', 'triqué'.

Verbs: 'abandonner', 'continuer', 'diminuer', 'expliquer', 'installier', 'préparer', 'protester', 'possérer' (from 'propriété'), 'souhaiter', 'teéphonner', 'vexer'.

Adverbs: 'malheureusement', 'seulement'.

/sə 'lamən/ 'seulement'.

V. Nouns: 'blessure', 'tabouret'.
Adjectives: 'abominable', 'capable', 'simple', 'terrible'.

Verbs: 'changer', 'dépendre', 'kot/ 'tricoter', 'visiter'.

Adverb: 'franchemement'.

An examination of the distribution of the loans across the five groups shows a clear tendency toward phonological adaptation of the borrowings. In particular, Group IV, which comprises the loans most thoroughly reshaped as they are incorporated into Breton, is also far and away the largest. The distributions are summarized below:

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In addition to the straight lexical borrowings from French, there are also a number of loanblends—i.e., items containing a Breton morph that replaces its French counterpart in the word. About a dozen of these have turned up in my data, among them: /bula/'ziRs/ 'bakery' < boulangerie + Br. -ezh (-es/), a nominalizing suffix similar to Fr. -erie. In the next example, Breton furnishes the radical, French the derivational suffix: /ispiserez/ < Br. ispiserezh (itself a received loan from French épicerie at an earlier stage of borrowing) plus Fr. -erie. A few additional examples: /gas'tRol/ < Br. kastlodenn 'stew-pan' plus Fr. (casse)role (note the initial /k-/ mutated to /g-/ following the definite article /a/, marking the noun as feminine); /nomzib'Ruye R/ 'to get out of a fix, set right' < Br. en em
(/nom/, the reflexive pronoun equivalent to Fr. se) plus débrouiller (with mutated initial /d/, i.e., /z/, following the pronoun); /nomz'sidə/ 'to make up one's mind' ≤ Br. en em (as above) plus décider. Finally, there are several mixed compound nouns of the following sort (both are insults): /Ras'ci/ 'race de chien' ≤ Fr. race 'breed' plus Br. /ci/ 'dog'; and /ba'spɛrt/ 'idiot, imbecile' ≤ Fr. bas 'low' plus Br. spered 'mind'.

4.0. The French influence on the Breton lexicon is a centuries old phenomenon. In spite of generations of efforts by the Breton literary elite to eliminate the French elements, native Breton speakers continue to incorporate French lexemes into their vernaculars. In fact, attempts at re-Celtifying the vocabulary (and the syntax, a matter I have not been able to pursue here) have been met by certain native Breton speakers of my acquaintance with protest and sometimes derision; not everyone is eager to have a putatively "authentic" Breton forced down their throats. Still, the fact that most of the native speakers were never schooled in their native language leaves room for doubt and insecurity about their speech. We detect in Brittany, then, a sociolinguistic condition akin to the "schizoglossia" proposed by Haugen (1972), but with some of its own particular characteristics: an aging population of bretons de naissance, largely illiterate in their first language, who are at once admired and admonished by a younger population of Breton speakers who have learned the standard dialect as a second language, are literate in the latter, and who, in many instances, are Breton language and culture stourmerien (militants). The older group unhesitatingly incorporates French borrowings in their speech, while many of the younger group view it as a point of principle to avoid this. Since the latter controls the written, hence, the prestigious variety of the language, the bretons de naissance have experienced a second-order, internal "patoisement" of their language (the first consisting of two centuries of efforts by the government to extirpate Breton and all other "patois" spoken in the country in order to promote French as the national language; cf. Morvannou 1980). This effect has been one of the factors underlying the native speakers' general apathy about the Breton movement and efforts to promote the language.
NOTES

1. Two extremes of this process are suggested by Albanian, on the one hand, with only 8% of indigenous lexical items and ultra-conservative Icelandic, on the other (Deroy 1956:304).

2. Translation: "Against Lubricity [title]. First, flee from the companionship, and the excessive familiarity which is an opportunity for this vice. After that, distance yourself from those who set a poor example and give us the opportunity for this sin. Third, avoid idleness and steer yourself toward an honest occupation. Fourth, do not nourish your body with too much refinement, but love abstinence, especially of wine that is too strong...Sixth, choose some mortification, especially when a great temptation arrives". Cited in Falc'hun 1957.

3. Though not all the Breton clergy were native Breton speakers. Le Noblezt happened to be.

4. It has been estimated that approximately 40% of the standard Breton lexicon is French based (Gourvil 1968:93).

5. Translation: "A little weeding in the garden—the lettuce, onions and shallots are nice, and the potatoes are germinating, but there are weeds too...And I see the neighbors crossing the bourg, the cars full of people, the grandmother and the aunt in the backseat...The days before the vote the campaign advocates were giving a little instruction to the old ladies. 'Oh, yes', she says, 'but Fanch or Job or Pierre (dead twenty or thirty years ago) were always red and the son is too...and I'm not going to change (afterwards a right-leaning neighbor will take her to vote), I'm not so stupid!'...Another way of discouraging people! But that doesn't work...There's something in the air". From Favereau 1981.

6. At an earlier stage of borrowing, when French was less widely and well known that it is today, French lexemes beginning with consonants that sounded, to Breton ears, as if they had already been mutated would be "restored" to their base form. This was especially true of French words in initial v-, interpreted as a mutated /b/ or /m/. Thus, véage 'voyage' > Br. beaj; vois 'voix' > mouezh, verger 'verger' > berjez; and in recent times, wagons > Bagoniôù (see Gourvil 1968:82). This interpretation of v- seems less prevalent now, perhaps due to the solid bilingualism of Breton speakers. I have documented a number of recent loans in which the French v- is maintained as the base initial consonant in Breton: voter > /'vot/ and vote /vol/; visiter >/vi'zit/ (alongside older, received, bizitiñ); vacances >/va'kásu/; vaisselles >/ve'sezl/; volant >/vo'lan/; vexer >/veksə/.

7. In addition to the Breton-type pluralization of 'advocates', the structure of the locution is also typically Breton: i.e., one noun may directly modify another without an intervening preposition, as in poan benn = mal de tête, mestr skol = maître d'école, pried Rosenn = époux de Rose, etc.
REFERENCES


Haugen, Einar. 1950. The analysis of linguistic borrowing. Lg. 26:210-231.


