Borrowings as Conflict Triggers in Russian Media Texts

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Abstract

The article looks at the specific features of the usage of borrowed Anglicisms in Russian texts and their perception by native speakers of Russian. Analysis of relevant linguistic studies in the sphere of media linguistics and borrowings, media texts, as well as lexicographic resources capturing the expansion of the thesaurus of the Russian language due to borrowings, shows that one of the stylistic features of the modern media is a growing number of only partly assimilated borrowings from the English language, including lexemes that form the value system guiding native speakers of the recipient language. The purpose of introducing borrowings into media texts is the attraction of the audience’s attention. However, it appears that the effect produced by borrowings on an average recipient is controversial. In order to test the suggested hypothesis, the authors examine the specific features of the usage of partly assimilated borrowings in media texts that refer to the issues of tolerance and their derivatives (bullying, cyberbullying, abuse, ageism, etc.). In the course of the research, the authors analyzed dictionary definitions of these lexemes, their representation in the Russian National Corpus, texts published by large Russian publishing houses and posted online, which helped to make conclusions regarding the degree of assimilation, frequency and specific features of the usage of these lexemes in media texts. The problem of perception of Anglicisms by various gender and age groups is examined on the basis of the analysis of comments to media texts containing borrowings, the statistics of corresponding search engine requests and survey results. The research has shown that the attitude to borrowings depends on the age, gender and education of the recipient and their usage in the media is not always reasonable.

Keywords: mediatization, media texts, headlines, borrowed words, loanwords, anglicisms, americanisms, tolerance, sociolinguistics.

1. Introduction

Politicization, juridification and mediatization of public communication have caused differentiation of linguistics; as a result, media linguistics has acquired the status of an independent discipline (Dobrosklnskaya 2008; Shmeleva 2016). The tradition of studying foreign lexis (Aristova 1978; Krysin 1996, 2002; Zemskaya 1996; Vinogradova 1998, etc.) is taking on new significance in the light of the transformation of the media space. Simultaneous transformation and differentiation of genres of media texts, as well as extension of regulatory boundaries of the used linguistic devices, especially their democratization and “Americanization” (Volodina 2008: 22), increase the relevance of studies of borrowings used in media texts. Lexical borrowing is a natural process. Ontogenesis of languages is connected with the history of their interaction, which

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transforms all levels of a language. Shifts in the lexical system are the most accessible for observation.

The spread of Anglicisms (or, to be more precise, Anglo-Americanisms) in national languages (in particular, in the Russian language) is caused by social, political and economic reasons. Performing the function of a lingua franca (International English, Global English, World English) in science, business and other spheres, the English language can be called the 21st-century Latin (Crystal 2003; Phillipson, 2009); English is also the leader in terms of Internet users relying on it as a language of communication (English in the World, 2012). As a global language, English influences a lot of other languages. Anglicization of the lexical system of the Russian language intensified in the 1980s, the main source of borrowings being the American variant of the English language (Krysin, 2002: 32). Nowadays, the process of borrowing Anglicisms has acquired a universal character.


Having analyzed lexicographic sources and research into borrowed Anglicisms (Boiko 2014; Dedyukhina 2011; Dyakov 2015; Huttle-Worth 1963; Larionova 1993; Maksimova 1998; Romanov 2000; Seshan 1996 and many others) and having summarized empirical observations of the usage of borrowings by native speakers of Russian, we agree that Anglicisms (Anglo-Americanisms) in the Russian language, like in other languages, first and foremost reflect the general trend towards development of a global industrial civilization. At the same time, there is a growing number of borrowings reflecting value orientations (Boiko, 2014). We have focused on borrowings denoting violations of social norms in the course of personal and virtual communication, e.g. lexemes denoting bullying at school or at work, abuse, problems of gender relations (тrolling, mobbing, bullying), etc.), i.e. intolerant and non-politically correct behavior. The concepts “tolerance” and “political correctness” have been studied by linguists from different angles (Abolin 2009; Isaeva, 2011; Mikhailova, 2004; Shamsutdinova, 2006; Sternin, Shilikha 2001 and many others). We understand tolerance as “readiness to accept otherness and coexist with it; flexibility and restraint in any situations, and a worldview without stable negative emotions or assessments” (Sternin, Shilikha 2001: 31), while as far as political correctness is concerned, we tend to consider it a more narrow concept: “undifferentiated attitude to other people regardless of their race, nationality, ethnic group, gender, age, culture, education, incurable diseases, disabilities or sexual identity” (Vashurina, 2012).

Like many other borrowings, the group of lexemes denoting intolerant and non-politically correct behavior spreads through media texts. As early as in the second half of the 20th century, P.L. Kapitsa metaphorically compared the effect produced by such texts with weapons of mass destruction in terms of their scale and force. This comparison is still relevant in the 21st century. It would be an oversimplification to say that borrowings are spread only through media texts;
however, this way of integration of borrowings into the speech of native speakers of the recipient language should not be underestimated either (Dobrosklonskaya, 2005: 225). More often than not borrowings are used in media texts for “ornamental” purposes. The media are trying to attract the attention of the audience by exploiting the pragmatics of novelty. A logical question arises as to the response of potential readers to this device.

Therefore, the objective of this research is to describe the specific features of functioning of borrowed lexemes denoting intolerant/non-politically correct behavior in Russian media texts and their perception by native speakers of the Russian language.

2. Materials and methods

We have selected lexemes denoting various kinds of intolerant and non-politically correct behavior and determined their derivatives. The next stage was to analyze the definitions of these lexemes in various English and Russian lexicographic sources, in the Russian National Corpus and media texts. For analysis, we selected new texts (generally, published not earlier than in 2015) posted on websites of famous news agencies, newspapers and magazines (Izvestia, Kommersant, Rossiiyskaya Gazeta, Vedomosti, Komsomolskaya Pravda, Novaya Gazeta, Argumenty i Fakty, etc.). The second stage of the research was the analysis of comments to media texts and conducting a survey designed so that native speakers of the Russian language could assess the reasonability of using borrowings denoting intolerant/non-politically correct behavior.

3. Discussion

A new theory of globalization as a new environment, in which languages exist, is developed in modern sociolinguistics. The processes of borrowing are particularly relevant within this paradigm, and we agree that media plays a significant role in extending globalization (Melnichenko, 2014; Onysko, 2014). The number and spreading speed of borrowings are increasing and the stages of assimilation into a recipient language are very swift. When we record the latest borrowings, we cannot even imagine, which of them will remain in the language and which ones will disappear. We tend to believe that most of the above-mentioned lexemes remain in the group of foreign language inclusions, i.e. their usage depends on the degree of familiarity of the speaker with the foreign language, is marked stylistically and in terms of genre. Perception of such inclusions by native speakers of a recipient language is controversial. This tendency has been identified by other researchers as well. In 2001, reflecting on the perception of the word “tolerance” as such, I.A. Sternin and K.M. Shilikhina used quotations from op-ed articles that vividly described the attitude of native speakers of the Russian language to borrowings (especially connected with values): “the word ‘tolerance’ is not well known among common native speakers of Russian yet”, for many speakers of Russian “tolerance is patience and liberality with a Western flavor, something more cool, more pragmatic and legally adjusted than just patience” (Sternin, Shilikhina 2001: 12). Surveys conducted in Voronezh have proved that the author of the article cited by the researchers was right. The above-mentioned authors think that rejection of the word “tolerance” is rooted in the Russian mentality and the tendency towards uncompromising attitudes. The very idea of tolerance and political correctness is perceived in a controversial way since in real life it turns into hyper-correctness (Lobanova, 2004; Shlyakhtina, 2009). At the same time, it should be pointed out that women and young people are generally more likely to use borrowings, which is proved by surveys. Other researchers have come to similar conclusions (Dyakov, 2015; Zabotkina, 1991). Talking about social groups that treat borrowings positively, A.I. Dyakov mentions young people, media professionals and urban population in general (Dyakov, 2015: 297). Some research shows that “different social, gender, age groups, use different Anglicisms, although the percentage of loan words is nearly the same for all groups” (Fenogenova et al, 2017). We partly agree with the aforementioned statement because the question if adopted lexical items can be described as loanwords at present stage of language development. But still the authors of the research confirm that to younger audience is a more active user of borrowed words.

“Knowing the reasons for borrowing is necessary for successful analysis of functional characteristics of Anglicisms in the Russian speech” (Dyakov, 2015) and other languages because despite the similarities that are solid differences in the process of borrowing words from other languages in every language (Bukina, 2016). We tend to think that some of the reasons for assimilation of borrowings denoting intolerant behavior are the following: the necessity to attract attention to a well-known existing problem, make it more relevant; increase the traffic of the
resource where the information is published; make the text sound more competent due to usage of a specialized lexeme briefly describing a complex concept (compare with the analysis of mediatexts categories, for instance (Aleksandrova, Slavkin, 2017). The concepts denoted by this group of lexemes are often discussed at the level of the government and a number of political organizations. In the context of juridification, politicization and mediatization of society discussed above, the desire to highlight the connection of social problems with the law is quite natural. As we see it, the same reason to a certain degree can explain the unwillingness of society to accept these borrowings. Most members of Russian society believe that such old familiar problems as fights or arguments between teenagers do not require juridification, so their discussion using lexemes claiming to be “scientific” or “special” is frowned upon, since it is perceived as an attempt to impose a certain type of thinking as right (Lobanova, 2004). It must be underlined linguistic purism in terms of language policy is a frequently discussed topic (Romanov, 2000, Ryazanova-Clarke, 2009). There are some interesting metaphoric descriptions of anglicisms are determined in papers (Argent, 2014).

The scientific community demonstrates the opposite points of view at the problem of borrowings in genereal. Many researchers show an alarmist approach to the issue of borrowings, talk of “deterioration of language” and use the lexeme “Rungkin” with negative connotations (although this word is used to describe the communication of Russians in English as a non-evalutive term (Proshina, 2014). In our turn, we tend to support the viewpoint, according to which, the current changes should not be labeled as degradation of language (Shmelev, 2005). Only the borrowings necessary for the language will remain (Verbitskaya, 2013). The answer to the question is still under discussion (Avetisyan, 2016) among Russian studies specialists as well as German scholars, French studies specialists and others. The discussion concerning loanwords is heated among specialists but we tend to agree with the idea that loanwords should not be presented as a reson for language degradation.

At the same time while concentrating on the issue of perception of anglicisms by average native speakers we have to agree that the growth of loanwords connected with concept tolerance can potentially change its perception as we agree with the statements that loanwords blur ethnosocial boundries (Boiko 2014; Kurbakova 2015; Kurbakova et al., 2015; Verenich, Kruglikova, 2012). It is obvious that language is value-realizing activity (Hodges, 2006).

The results of the conducted analysis of the specific features characterizing the functioning of some of the latest borrowings in the Russian language are of practical value for specialists working with media texts. In the course of preparation of a media text, it is necessary to remember that the mass recipient is not yet well-acquainted with these lexemes and the concepts they denote and have controversial attitudes towards them, which should be taken into account when using these lexemes in media texts. At the same time, a borrowing used in the media attracts the attention of the audience, thus reaching its pragmatic goal (increasing the number of views, etc.) (compare with the analysis of the usage anglicisms connected with discussed topic in French media (Divita, Curtis, 2019). In general, we agree with the point of view that the mass media should help to overcome constant discontent with the language (Brusenskaya, Kulikova, 2018) instead of triggering linguistic conflicts.We tend to think that special criteria for evaluating the specific if using loanwords in media should be created. The research should be conducted on sociolinguistic and cognitive methods (Zenner et al., 2012).

4. Results

We suppose that the group of lexemes (and their derivatives) denoting different types of intolerant/non-politically correct behavior or negative discrimination that are characterized by relatively high usage frequency includes the following words: абьюз [abuse], абьюзер [an abuser], абьюзерша [a female abuser], абьюзивный [abusive], абьюзить [to abuse] (frequently spelt with a “ь”) referring to psychological violence; эйджизм [agesim] (sometimes spelt incorrectly as ‘эйджеизм’), эйджастский [ageist] referring to discrimination based on age; эйбилизм [ableism] – discrimination of people with chronic diseases and disabilities; буллинг [bullying], кибербуллинг [cyberbullying], also анти/буллинговый [anti/bullying (adj.)], буллинговать [to bully], буллингующий, буллинговый (both are forms of the adj. “bullying”) and буль [a bully] – (often used in Russian resources) both an initiator and a victim of bullying, буллер [a bully] (occasionally булерша [a female bully]) – an initiator of bullying; троллинг [trolling], троль [a troll], троллинуть [to troll] (and its numerous derivatives, e.g. потролливать/поторолить, вэтролливать/вэтроллить, перетролливать/перетроллить, заптролливать/заптроллить,
The examined group of lexemes is a non-exhaustive list; we do not claim that the selection of material is absolutely objective. At the same time, it is this group of lexemes that semantically adjoin the examined group – bullying people in inferior positions by those in superior positions in the workplace; шитье [sewing] – coercive practices of official rituals strengthening a shady hierarchy in a team; мизогиния [misogyny] – hatred of women based on gender (мизогин, мизогинист [both mean “a misogynist”], also мизогинистка [a female misogynist]); газлиайтинг [gaslighting] (derivatives: газлютер [gaslighter], газлийтинговой [gaslighting (adj.)]) – depreciation of someone’s personality; виктимблейминг [victim blaming] (also виктимность [victimity], виктимный [victim (adj.)]) – holding the victim of illegal actions at fault for the harm that befell them; боди/слут/скинни/фэтшейминг [body/slut/skinny/fat shaming] – criticizing people in public in order to make them feel ashamed of their looks, physiological peculiarities, the desire to look well, being thin or overweight; менсплейминг [mansplaining] (sometimes spelt as мэнсплейминг) – discrimination of women by men, saying that women lack intellectual abilities; менсспрединг [manspreading] (sometimes spelt as менспрединг) – men’s way of behaving in an intentionally relaxed manner demonstrating their superiority, etc.

We do not focus as much on such lexemes as расизм [racism], ксенофобия [xenophobia], сексизм [sexism] and гомофобия [homophobia], since they can be considered well-assimilated by the Russian language. At the same time, some of their synonyms started to be used recently (for example, колоризм [colorism] meaning “discrimination based on skin color”). Some lexemes, such as мачизм [machism], that semantically adjoin the examined group of lexemes, are also of interest, but the history of assimilation of this lexeme by the Russian language is vague.

Some lexemes, such as мизогиния, мизогин и мизогинист have become relevant again in the recent years in spite of the fact that they were used a long time ago (see dictionaries of borrowings published at the end of the 19th – the beginning of the 20th century (Chudinov 1910; Mikhelson, 1865; Popov, 1907). The examined group of lexemes is a non-exhaustive list; we do not claim that the selection of material is absolutely objective. At the same time, it is this group of lexemes that comes under notice in Russian media texts of the first quarter of the 21st century in the light of detabooing of many communication topics. Analysis of Russian lexicographic sources has shown the representation of the above-mentioned lexemes is scarce (for example, троллинг and бульлинг – see Big Dictionary of the Russian Language ed. by S.A. Kuznetsov, эйджизм, моббинг – see Dictionary by T.F. Efremova, мизогинист, моббинг, бульлинг, троллинг in dictionaries of loanwords). It should be noted that a large number of borrowings that recently appeared in the Russian language do not refer directly to intolerant/non-politically correct behavior, but are thematically connected with this group of lexemes.

For example, inappropriate behavior involving psychological abuse in respect of people with peculiarities of appearance (бодишейминг [body shaming]) is connected with the idea of accepting one’s own body with all its drawbacks (бодипозитив [body positivity]). The lexeme бодипозитив is now actively used in media texts and has a lot of derivatives: бодипозитивщик [a body-positive person], бодипозитивщица [a body-positive woman], бодипозитивный [body-positive], etc. Similar processes are taking place regarding the topic of sex: borrowings denoting people with nonstandard sexual orientation or certain sexual preferences have appeared (or activated in new contexts) in the Russian language (гомосексуалы [gays], лесбиянки [lesbians], асексуалы [asexuals], пансексуалы [pansexuals], гетеросексуалы [heterosexuals], трансесексуалы [transsexuals], трансгендеры [transgenders], etc.).

The words троллинг [trolling] and кибербуллинг [cyberbullying] were borrowed by the Russian language together with the lexeme hater and its derivatives (хейтер, хейтерить [both mean “to hate”], хейтерский [hater’s], хейты [hates], etc.). Correlation can be noticed between the usage frequency of lexemes denoting issues of tolerance and problems discussed in society. In our opinion, discussions of bullying at school conducted at multiple levels and the pension reform of 2018 have caused an increase in the usage frequency of such lexemes as эйджизм [ableism] and бульлинг [bullying], while there are very few examples of usage of other associated words, for instance, эйдизм [ableism].

On the Internet, the analyzed group of lexemes is featured in texts, the purpose of which is to interpret these lexemes. As a rule, the headline sounds like a question syntactically resembling a search engine request: “What is X?”, where X is a lexeme denoting intolerant behavior. Such texts constitute the main content of pseudo-educational websites, but in fact, these are the same texts rewritten in different ways. Structurally and stylistically these texts resemble encyclopedia entries;
however, their content is fairly superficial. In this case, supply meets demand, since search requests that sound like “what is X”, “X meaning”, “X in simple terms” are quite frequent (although these are not the most frequent requests), where X is a lexeme denoting intolerant or non-politically correct behavior. Texts representing concise dictionaries of “trendy” lexemes are also frequent (Trendy words: 20 new expressions used by young people; A dictionary of tolerance; Abuse, victim-blaming, harassment — terms you need to know, etc.). Such vocabulary is widely used on social networking sites, arousing heated discussions in comments and provoking users into verbal abuse, which is actually a manifestation of ageism, bullying, trolling, etc. Usage and deliberate provocation of topics sparking conflicts can also be labeled with another borrowed word — флейминг [flaming] (Krongauz 2016: 152). It should be noted that this lexeme is also used to denote other concepts.

In Russian media texts, the examined lexemes are especially common in headlines. They are used according to a certain pattern. Since a headline performs decorative and informative functions, a borrowing is usually accompanied by a Russian equivalent, a descriptive phrase, which is used within an explanatory context (Kitanina, Trukhanova 2019): Office wars. What is mobbing and who becomes a victim of workplace bullying (Argumenty i Fakty); Only bossing is worse than mobbing. What can you do if you are bullied at work (Komsomolskaya Pravda).

Texts of periodicals we have researched contain fewer borrowings. They are also used according to the above-mentioned principle. Totally we analyzed usage of over 400 lexemes belonging to the group under consideration. Some of them (for example, эйблизм [ableism]) were used only a few times, while others were very frequent (абьюз [abuse], буллинг [bullying]). Abuse at work is a much less common topic in the media than family violence. Probably, the reason is that abuse in the workplace happens in the presence of witnesses and is regulated by the law. However, are witnesses really effective and what can the law do if the victim of abuse is an emigrant who badly needs money and, therefore, often has to work in the place he/she was able to find, in the atmosphere of constant shouting and intimidation? (Moskovskij Komsomolets); It’s no secret that in Russia, just as in all other countries, an antisocial phenomenon of ageism exists in the labor market. Translated into Russian, age is means discrimination based on age (Izvestia); On 13th June at 1 p.m. a discussion about school bullying will take place. If you have never heard this word, you should know it and be afraid of it: bullying means teasing, collective abuse. The main roles in bullying and behavior strategies in such situations are going to be discussed (Vedomosti); Violence has many faces. Thanks to the changes taking place in 21st century, now it is discussed: economic violence, gaslighting and other forms of psychological abuse are no more taboo subjects, which is important (Gazeta.ru); “Victim blaming definitely exists in our society, — says Nazaralieva. — So the fear of being accused by others, the fear that people will think that everything happened of the victim’s own will, that the child provoked the abuser, seduced him, is quite often well-grounded (Meduza); According to expert estimates, the financial losses borne by the German economy as a result of resignations of employees caused by problems at work amount to 50 million euros per year. Trying to understand the essence of the problem, lawyers even created a new term – mobbing (RBC).

The analysis shows that such texts are structured in a way that encourages the recipient to focus on the opportunity to describe a familiar phenomenon with a special term. Thus, the status of the considered problem is upgraded (Krysin, 1962).

In order to analyze the perception of borrowed lexemes, we reviewed users’ comments to texts containing poorly assimilated Anglicisms denoting intolerant behavior. Many people perceive borrowings with anxiety and actively suggest that borrowings should be removed from media texts. For example, this is a comment to the article about bullying in Komsomolskaya Pravda: Why can’t bullying be denoted by a Russian word? For example, “задирание”, “травля”? Is our native language so poor? In general, it should be noted that the audience of websites belonging to newspapers and magazines, as well as data portals, is not so active; as a rule, such discussions take place on social networking sites and forums. Links to published materials are posted on official websites of periodicals and personal webpages. Numerous comments become a kind of continuation of a media text, but we only looked at comments published on the official websites of periodicals.

In order to specify the acquired data, in June 2019, we conducted an online survey. 128 respondents took part in the survey (76 % — male, 24 % — female; over 80 % of the respondents have a college degree, 70 % of them are not linguists). In the course of the survey, we wanted to
find out how well native speakers of Russian know the meaning of borrowed words denoting intolerant and non-politically correct behavior, how often they use these words and what is their attitude to the usage of such lexemes. The respondents were asked about both frequently and rarely used lexemes (ab’yuz, eidzhizm, eiblizm, bulling, trolling, mobbing, mizoginiya, viktimbleiming, bodipozitiv, menspreding). The lexemes were presented out of context. The results of the survey are presented in the table below.

**Table 1.** Perception of borrowings denoting intolerant and non-politically correct behavior. Survey results.

| Do you know the meaning of these words? |  
|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1. I know the meaning of all of these words. | 9 % |
| 2. I don’t know the meaning of any of these words. | 20 % |
| 3. I have heard these words, but I cannot give their exact definitions. | 11 % |
| 4. I know some of these words (indicate which ones). | 60 % |

| How often do you use them? |  
|----------------------------|--|
| 1. Never. | 42.3 % |
| 2. Hardly ever. | 28.1 % |
| 3. Sometimes. | 21.0 % |
| 4. Often. | 7.8 % |

| Do you think that the usage of these words has become the norm? |  
|---------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Yes | 17.2 % |
| 2. Why not? | 23.4 % |
| 3. Hardly. | 12.5 % |
| 4. It’s better to use Russian words. | 46.9 % |

Although the conducted survey was not a large-scale one, it clearly shows that native speakers of Russian are not very familiar with this group of borrowings and generally have a controversial attitude to them. Detailed analysis of responses (including the age and gender of respondents) demonstrates that over 80 % of the survey participants over 45 years old tend to treat usage of borrowed lexemes negatively. Among the respondents who treat usage of borrowings positively over 60 % are female.

5. **Conclusion**

Globalization is connected with the spread of the English language (predominantly its American variant) and, consequently, expansion of borrowed cultural and behavioral patterns. One example is the group of borrowings discussed above that are filling the existing cognitive and semantic lacunae. This process is being actively reflected and to a large extent initiated by the modern media. At the same time, analysis shows that the attitude of native speakers to such borrowings is controversial. The spread lexemes are connected with ideas that contradict many traditional beliefs about tolerance and political correctness.

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