
A PAT on the back? ‘Invisible’ borrowing in Guernésiais

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Résumé

Languages in contact commonly leave an imprint on one other. The most straightforward of these imprints to identify is MAT-borrowing, which results in clearly identifiable lexical items of one language (the donor language) being used in utterances of another language (the recipient language). This stands in contrast with PAT-borrowing, which does not involve any such incorporation of “other language” material but rather results in the reshaping of existing structures of the recipient language on the model of the donor language. This type of language change is therefore arguably more “invisible” to speakers since no easily identifiable “other language” material is present.

This paper will present a detailed examination of PAT-borrowing in Guernésiais, the Norman variety spoken in Guernsey (British Channel Islands), which is now at an advanced state of language shift. My data, drawn from many years of extensive fieldwork, reveal instances of where i) a category of Guernésiais has been restructured to align more with a corresponding category in English; ii) a new pattern of usage has been assigned to an existing category; and iii) a new category replaces an existing one.

The paper will also highlight a major difference between MAT- and PAT-borrowing, namely that, whereas MAT-borrowing can only be explained with reference to the dominant language, PAT-borrowing can on occasion admit an alternative, internal explanation. It is therefore interesting to consider whether some of the changes that will be presented might have occurred in Guernésiais even if it had not been in contact with English and whether, in contexts such as this, language contact and what we might term the general tendencies of language change may, in fact, be serving to reinforce one another.

Mots-Clés: Guernésiais, borrowing, morphosyntax, language change, language obsolescence, language contact, French dialectology

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