

Lexical Borrowings from German and English into Serbian and Croatian

**Radmila J. Gorup
Columbia University**

When lexical borrowing is discussed, linguists generally try to answer three basic questions:

- 1) Why do languages—Serbian and Croatian in our case¹—borrow from other languages?
- 2) From where and what do they borrow?
- 3) How do they adapt these borrowings into their linguistic systems?

To satisfy its lexical needs a language can create a new word, it can borrow a word from another language, or it can add a new meaning to an already existing word. Borrowing appears to be a simpler method than the two other methods because a culture adopts an object or a concept from another culture and borrows the respective foreign word at the same time.

Every speech community borrows lexical items. Borrowings can be two-sided when two neighbors borrow from each other. This, however, is never to an equal extent. It can also be one-sided when borrowing arises as a result of conquest and domination, either armed or cultural. In this case, we speak of cultural diffusion. In the century that just ended, and in particular since World War Two, English (American English) has been the source from which most languages have drawn to enrich their lexicon. Borrowing from American culture, which is seen as dominant, is mostly one-sided.

From the beginning of the nineteenth century, as well as earlier in their history, South Slavs borrowed largely from the languages of Western Europe, primarily from German, and to a lesser degree from French, Italian, and English. Most of the material goods and technological and other abstract notions were coming from these countries. In addition, many areas of the former Yugoslavia were parts of the Habsburg Empire until 1918. Thus, the countries of the former Yugoslavia acquired most products of industrial civilization in

¹ The term “Serbo-Croatian” is also used occasionally in this article as a technical term as it is used in reference literature and in many academic institutions in this country and abroad.

the nineteenth century and earlier from Germany and Austria. Since the end of World War Two, the constant source for lexical innovation in this area is American English.

As we know, people borrow to name newly acquired objects and concepts, for which they do not have names in their own lexicon. However, borrowings from a dominant culture often extend to objects and concepts that are not necessarily connected with cultural novelties. English is fast becoming a *lingua franca*. It has attained a status of prestige among languages, and young people in particular use English words to show their sophistication and to display a higher social status that the knowledge of English symbolizes.

Jovan Ćirilov published a dictionary of new words in 1982.² This is not a comprehensive dictionary; thus, the comments given here should be taken with reservation. The dictionary contains 1,082 loan words, loan-translations borrowed since World War Two, as well as a number of new words. All the entries are followed by a short definition and explanation of origin. When new words are disregarded, largely socialist expressions like *samoupravljanje* for 'self-management', *samoposluga/samousluga* for 'supermarket', *kućna pomoćnica* for 'maid, servant', etc., it is a surprise to see that approximately 85% of all loan words and loan-translations come from English and only 0.05% from German. French, Russian, and even Italian ranked higher (French 5.5%, Russian 3%, Italian 1.3%). There is no doubt that had this count been performed on loan words introduced into Serbo-Croatian at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries the result would have been reversed, showing the highest percentage of loan words coming from German.

The most interesting question is: How are the borrowed words altered in order to make their integration into the phonological, morphological, and semantic systems of the language recipient possible?

When we discuss borrowings from English we have to keep in mind that the English lexicon itself contains a high degree of loan words. Thus, while some words are borrowed directly, others are received in an already altered form. In many instances, these are international terms, words present in many languages. These words, however, are fully integrated into the system of English, and they function as native words.

Once the English word is borrowed the process of adaptation starts. The borrowed lexical item has to adapt itself first at the phonological level. At this level, English phonemes are replaced by native phonemes.

² Jovan Ćirilov, *Rečnik novih reči* (Belgrade: Biblioteka Grifon, 1982).

Rudolf Filipović³ has outlined four ways in which this is performed:

- 1) Adaptation is performed according to the pronunciation of the loan word: English **jeep** /dzi:p/ SC *džip*;
- 2) The word is integrated into the phonological system of Serbian and Croatian (henceforth SC) according to its spelling: English **bard** /ba:d/ SC *bard*;
- 3) The make-up of the loan word is based in part on spelling and in part on pronunciation: English **interview** /intə:vju:/ SC *intervju*;
- 4) The word is formed under the influence of an intermediary language. For example, English **bluff** /blʌf/ is adopted into SC as *blef* because it came to it through the intermediary of German.

While language contact in the past was mostly through written texts, thus visual, and most loan words were accepted in a written form, today contacts are mostly audial (video, music, or film).

When integration is done according to the pronunciation of the word, the English phonemes are replaced by the closest native phonemes. In SC, English vowels are replaced by five basic vowels:

English	<i>/i:/ and /i/</i>	with	<i>/i/</i>
	<i>/e/ and /ɛ/</i>		<i>/e/</i>
	<i>/a:/ and /ʌ/</i>		<i>/a/</i>
	<i>/o/ and /ɔ/</i>		<i>/o/</i>
	<i>/u/ and /w/</i>		<i>/u/</i>

!! *ə* *ʌ*

The English */ə/* as in **flirt** /flɜ:t/ is substituted by either *-er* or *-ir* in SC (*flert* and *flirt*), and the English schwa is substituted by either *-er* or *-or* (English **corner** /cornə/ SC *korner* English **director** /directə/ SC *direktor*).

English diphthongs are rendered either by two phonemes, as in *plejof*, *najlon*, *boj*, *faul*, *šou* (Engl. */ei/*, */ai/*, */oi/*, */aw/* and */ow/*), or as one phoneme. The English words **clearing**, **fair**, **show**, and **puritan**, containing the diphthongs */iə/*, */eə/*, */ow/* and */uə/*, are interpreted in SC as */i/*, */e/*, */o/*, and */u/*: *kliring*, *fer*, *šo*, and *puritanac*.

The majority of English consonants have their equivalent in SC. There are four English consonantal phonemes that do not exist in SC: */θ/*, */ð/*, */ŋ/* and */w/*. They are interpreted in Serbo-Croatian as */d/*, */t/*, */ing/*, and */v/*:

³ Rudolf Filipović, *Anglicizmi u hrvatskom ili srpskom jeziku* (Zagreb: JAZU, Školska knjiga, 1990). This extensive scholarly work made my task much easier.

English	thriller	SC <i>triler</i>	/θ/
	Rutherford	<i>radeford</i>	/ð/
	pudding	<i>puding</i>	/ŋ/
	week end	<i>vikend</i>	/v/

The SC /p/ and /t/ are not aspirated, and /d/ and /t/ are dentals.

In writing, English letters that do not exist in SC are replaced with similar letters: *w* with *v* (*vikend*), *y* with *j* (*boj*), *x* with *ks* (*kseroks*), *qu* with *kv* (*sekvenser*), etc. English double consonants are rendered as single.

German loan words⁴ follow a similar pattern in which German phonemes are replaced by the SC phonemes most similar in articulation. Thus umlauts *ö* and *ü* are substituted with plain *e* and *i* (Ger. **das Löten** – SC *letovanje*; Ger. **rückwärts** – SC *rikverc*).

German diphthongs are replaced either by a single phoneme or by two distinct phonemes. Thus, /au/ is either /a/ as SC *urlab*, *šrafčiger*, from Ger. **Urlaub** and **schraubenzieher**, or /au/: SC *Austrija*. The diphthong /ei/ is either /aj/ or /a/: Ger. **Schleier** – SC *šlajer*; Ger. **Tischlerei** – SC *tišleraj*, Ger. **Eimer** – SC *amper*; Ger. **Leiter** – SC *lotre*. The German /ie/ is interpreted as /i/: Ger. **riegen** – SC *ribati*.

German consonants are replaced by similar SC consonants. German **ch** has three pronunciations in SC: German Ich-laut is rendered most often as /k/, rarely as /h/; ach-laut is either /f/ or /h/ (Ger. **Narichten** – SC *nariktati*; Ger. **Schlauch** – SC *šlahuh* or *šlauf*). The German aspirated **h** is weakened in SC: Ger. **Hebel** – SC *hebla*. The German voiced **s** in the initial position becomes voiceless in SC: **Seil** – SC *sajla*, while the voiced **s** in the medial position remains voiced: Ger. **Düse** – SC *dizna*. Initial **sp-** and **st-** remain *sp-* and *st-* in SC: Ger. **striken** SC – *štrikati*, Ger. **einsparen** – SC *ušparati*. The German voiced /b/, /d/, and /g/ become voiceless: Ger. **abziehen** – SC *apčigovati*, Ger. **Büchse** – SC *piksla*, Ger. **Grundbuch** – SC *gruntovnica*, Ger. **Rekrut** – SC *regrut*, etc.

The German letter **w**, which does not exist in SC, is written as *b*: Ger. **Kirchweihe** – CS *kirbaj*. Likewise, the nasal combination /ng/ remains /ng/: Ger. **Dichtung** – SC *dihung*. German combination **pf** is replaced either by *f* or *p*: Ger. **Pfusher** – SC *fušer*; Ger. **stopfen** – SC *štopati*, etc.

When words are received in the language through the intermediary of another language, their phonological form might reflect that status. Thus, the

⁴ For more details on German influences, see Miloš Trivunac, "Nemački uticaji u našem jeziku," *Strani pregled* 7–9, nos.1–4 (1936–37): 74–169, and Johannes von Grotzky, *Morphologische Adaptation Deutscher Lehnwörter im Serbokroatischen* (Munich: Dr. Rudolph Trofenik, 1978).

SC words *blef*, *dubl*, *fleš*, and *flert*, based on the English **bluff**, **double**, **flush**, and **flirt** (also SC *štrajk* based on English **strike**) came into SC via German; on the other hand, English **gabardine** came via French as *gabarden* (also *gabardin*). French can be seen as an intermediary in the SC nouns ending in **-aža**, such as *reportaža*, *blamaža*, *reciklaža*, *plantaža* or nouns ending in **-i**, like *žiri* (French for **jury**).

At the morphological level, the formation of loan words depends on whether or not the adopted word was a free morpheme or a bound morpheme. Borrowing of free morphemes is usually unlimited and can happen whenever the need for a new word arises. By contrast, suffixes are not transferred freely. As a rule, they are adopted initially as a part of a loan word, kept in the language for some time, and then discarded or replaced by a native suffix of a similar semantic content.

When a free morpheme is introduced into a language it has to undergo changes before it is fully integrated into the language. Here, analysts look at the changes in categories and at the features by which the language recipient differs from the language source.

According to Filipović, a loan word undergoes basically three phases at the morphological level:

- 1) the formation of the basic morphological shape is established;
- 2) the morphological category is integrated into the categories of the language;
- 3) loan words are incorporated into the declensional or conjugational system of the language recipient.

English and German unbound morphemes are generally quickly adapted without changes into SC. These are the most frequent loan words: *džip*, *bar*, *fer*, etc. Some others are more difficult to integrate, such as *šou*, *infarkt*, or *žiri*.

When the loan word contains a derivational suffix, it is adopted into the language “as is,” but the adaptation does not end there. As the English suffixes do not fit into the system of SC, such loan words remain for some time and, at some later date, the suffix is either replaced by a native suffix or altogether dropped. Examples of words that keep English suffixes are: *farmer*, *triler*, *parking*, etc. However, these are examples in which the adaptation has not yet been completed. The process of adaptation is terminated in loan words such as: *supermenski* (adj.), containing the native masculine singular suffix *-ski*, or *reportaža*, containing the native suffix *-a* for feminine singular nouns.

In the case of SC *boks*, *stenograf*, *erkondišn*, *hepiend*, etc., the original loan words were adopted into SC with the English suffixes *-ing* and *-er*, but they were then dropped altogether

In the second phase, loan words are integrated into the morphological categories of SC. As the majority of the loan words tend to be nouns (approximately 75%), we look at how the category of gender is assigned to loan words. Since English and Serbo-Croatian differ in this respect—English has natural gender and Serbo-Croatian primarily grammatical gender—we can expect changes here.

Generally, nouns denoting animates receive gender according to their sex. Feminine gender is assigned to English nouns that name feminine beings, regardless of whether they end in a vowel or a consonant: *gerla*, *skvo*, *lejdi*, *mis*, *misiz*, etc. With inanimate nouns, the form of the word and/or its pronunciation determines the gender assignment.

In Serbo-Croatian, nouns ending in a consonant are primarily masculine; nouns ending in *-a* are primarily feminine; and nouns ending in *-o/-e* are primarily neuter. Since English nouns tend to end in a consonant, the great majority of English loan words are interpreted as masculine nouns: *šop*, *bajt*, *bedž*, *barbikju*, *džins*, *nju luk*, *nju veiv*, *reket*, etc. However, most English nouns which end in *-o* and *-i* are also assigned masculine gender: *cargo*, *pogo*, *video*, *bungalo*, *tornado*; *viski*, *džanki*, *dendi*, *derbi*, etc. Nouns in *-i* represent an innovation in SC.

Nouns coming into SC from English that were borrowed from either Latin or French, and which end in *-ism*, such as Engl. **feminism**, **structuralism**, etc. are assigned to the masculine gender. Nouns borrowed into English from Latin and/or French and integrated into English with suffixes *-ation*, as in **aviation**, *-ture*, as in **structure**, *-sion*, as in **tension**, are reinterpreted as feminine nouns in SC ending in *-cija*, *-ura* or *-zija*: *normalizacija*, *eskalacija*, *alienacija*, *circulacija*, *televizija*, *struktura*, etc. The English **vision**, however, was assigned to the masculine gender: *vižn*. Nouns ending in *-ssion*, such as **session** or **fission**, can be either masculine or feminine gender: SC *sešn* and *fisija*.

The rare nouns which end in *-a* in English are assigned to the feminine gender when borrowed into SC: *koka kola*, *sekvoja*, *gorila*, *soda*, *kvota*, etc.

Gender can also be assigned on the basis of association with a local word. Thus, the English **jungle**, even though it is pronounced with a consonant at the end, through association with SC *šuma* ‘forest’, becomes the feminine noun *džungla*.

Gender sometimes oscillates, and we have nouns that are both feminine and masculine, or one geographical area may use one gender and the other the other. SC *parti* (from English **party**) can be either feminine or masculine.

Also, the noun *problem* can be either masculine *problem* or feminine *problema*, etc.

German feminine nouns ending in **-e** remain feminine in SC, receiving either the *-la* or *-na* suffix: Ger. **die Zange** – SC *canga*; Ger. **die Duse** – SC *dizna*. Feminine and masculine nouns ending in **-el** become the feminine gender in SC. They end in *-la*: Ger. **der Kipfel** – SC *kifla*; **die Kapsel** – SC *kapisla*. German neuter nouns in **-erl** become feminine nouns in SC: Ger. **das Nockel** – SC *nokla*; **das Hockel** – SC *hokla*. German masc. nouns, *nomens agentis*, in **-er** remain masculine in SC: Ger. **der Backer** – SC *pekar*, *lekar* etc. German neuter verbal nouns in **-en**, remain neuter in SC with the ending *-nje*: *štopanje*, *štimovanje*, etc.

Once the word has been integrated into a language it assumes a life of its own and follows changes other native words undergo. Thus, feminine forms are derived from the adopted masculine nouns. They are assigned native derivational suffixes for feminine gender *-ica*, *-ka*, *-a*, etc.: *vegetarijanac* – *vegetarijanka*; *trener* – *trenerka*; *teniser* – *teniserka*; *spiker* – *spikerka*, *supermen* – *supermenka*, *striptizer* – *striptizerka*, *menadžer* – *menadžerka* (Croatian: *tenisač* – *tenisačica*, *vikend kuća*, *spikerica*, *striptiz igračica*, etc)

Another important feature by which English and German differ from SC is the category of verbal aspect. While English and German employ other devices to express what in Slavic languages is performed by the category of verbal aspect, they do not have that distinction grammaticalized and their verbs are unmarked for perfective/imperfective opposition. The word *work*, for example, can be both a noun and a verb, and also either a perfective or an imperfective verb, depending on the context.

SC verbs have the infinitival suffix *-ti* or *-ći*. Both English and German loan verbs are rendered in Serbian with the *-ti* suffix: *miksati*, *bukirati*, *bojkotovati*, *boksovati*, *farbati*, *pasovati*, etc. (Croatian *bojkotirati*, *boksirati*, etc., with the *-irati* ending in many instances instead of *-ovati*, which occurs in Serbian).

In primary adaptation, English verbs can be transferred into SC either as two forms marked for aspect, such as *startati* (pf.) and *startovati* (impf.), or just one form unmarked for aspect (*miksati*, *čartirati*, *trenirati*, etc.). Depending on their lexical meaning, some of these verbs will skew toward the perfective, like *čartirati*, while others will tend to be imperfective, like *trenirati*, *boksovati*, *fajlati* (Croatian *boksati*), etc.

In the secondary adaptation these neutral verbs can undergo further development and create their aspectual pairs, in almost all cases the perfective forms. Thus *blefirati* (to bluff) created *iz-blefirati*, *za-blefirati*, *blefnuti*, all perfectives; English **to dribble** became *dribovati* (Croatian *driblati*) and then

developed the perfective form *iz-driblovati*, *pre-driblovati*, etc. Additional examples are *istrenirati*, *izmiksati*, etc.

Once assigned to a category, the loan nouns and verbs are declined and conjugated like all other native nouns and verbs, in singular and plural.

SC adjectives are marked for gender, number, and case. In the primary adaptation, adjectives borrowed from English do not decline and are not marked for gender and number: *fit*, *vestern*, *fer*, etc. In the secondary adaptation, they acquire SC suffixes, usually *-ski*, *-ov*, *-an*: *bokserski*, *lordov*, *strandardan*, *rekordan*, etc. After that they have all the characteristics of SC adjectives, i.e., they have gender and are declined in the singular and plural: *bokserski tim* (masculine singular), *bokserska sala* (feminine singular), *bokserski klubovi* (masculine plural), etc.

Likewise, in the primary adaptation, German adjectives are unmarked for gender, number, and case: *grao šešir* (masculine singular), *grao haljina* (feminine singular), *grao šeširi* (masculine plural). In the secondary adaptation, they acquire the native suffixes *-ak* or *-av*: *frišak* (Ger. **frisch**), *šlampav* (Ger. **schlampig**).

At the semantic level, loan words may follow one of these paths:

- 1) The borrowed word preserves the identical lexical meaning (one or more) it has in the source language. For example, the English **paperback** is transferred in SC as *pejperbek* 'soft-cover book', the English **kilt** is adopted in SC as *kilt*, preserving both meanings: 'Scottish national costume' and 'skirt of the same type'. The English **trance**, SC *trans*, preserves three lexical senses: 'ecstasy or rapture', 'a hypnotic state', and 'insensibility to external surroundings'.
- 2) If a word has many meanings, it is unlikely to find all of them adopted into SC. Loan words tend to be adopted in the language recipient in a more narrow sense, signifying only the object or notion that was brought into the culture. Thus, **sheriff** is adopted in SC to signify the chief law officer of the country. Its second meaning, 'chief administrative officer in England', dating from before the Norman conquest, is unknown. The English noun **test** preserves three lexical senses: 'an examination or trial to prove an assertion', 'the method used in making such assertion', and 'a set of questions to determine a person's knowledge', but loses at least five additional meanings it has in English. The narrowing can be not only in the number of lexical senses but also in the semantic field. This, however, is a rare occurrence. English **tanker** is transferred into SC, but means only 'an oil tanker', not other types of ships, as in English.

- 3) Once a word is integrated into the semantic system of a language, the precision of its lexical meaning has been weakened a bit and conditions are ripe for the word to acquire the new meaning which does not exist in the language source.

SC *korner* (from the English **corner**) which was borrowed originally to signify the kick from the corner, introduced from soccer, has been extended to signify the space behind the goal line. Likewise, SC *aut* (from English **out**), also a term from soccer, was originally adopted into SC to mean that the ball is out of play, but was extended to signify also the part of terrain outside the field. SC *najlon*, originally meaning the synthetic material and garments made from it, is extended to signify plastic in general, mostly plastic bags. The English **bar**, originally introduced into SC to refer to a counter across which drinks are served or a place where drinks are kept, now mostly signifies a place of entertainment with music and a program, etc.

In addition to words transferred from English and German into SC, which undergo phonological and morphological adaptation, the speaker may encounter words which have the same make-up and feel as though they have been borrowed from English. However, these words are *pseudo borrowings*. They are not borrowed since they do not exist in the language source. For example, Serbian *golman* is derived from the loan word *gol* and the English word **man** (by analogy with the English **superman**). From the English **tennis**, adapted in SC as *tenis*, Serbian develops *teniser* by adding the English derivational suffix **-er**. All these morphs exist in English, but the words do not. The same is true for Serbian *vaterpolist*, ‘player of waterpolo’.

From the masculine SC *farmer* (English **farmer**) the feminine form *farmerka* is derived, as well as *farmerke* (Croatian *farmerice*), standing for ‘blue jeans’. From the masculine *kajak* (English **kayak**) *kajakaš* is derived by adding the native suffix *-aš*. Likewise, from *vikend* (English **week end**) Serbian created *vikendica* to signify a house used for weekends with the addition of the native suffix *-ica*.

Verbal nouns are derived from borrowed verbs with the addition of the native derivational suffix *-nje*: *testiranje*, *svingiranje*, *žiranje*, *blefiranje*, *zumiranje*, etc.

Sometimes an English word is adopted into SC in its plural form but interpreted as masculine singular. Its plural form is then derived by the addition of the plural ending *-i*. Thus SC *keks* (English **cakes**) has plural *keksi*; *skinheds* and *Bitlz* have plural forms *skinhedsi* and *Bitlzi*.

In certain cases, one element of a compound word is omitted and the part which is preserved assumes the full meaning. English **combine harvester** is

transferred as SC *kombajn*, **corner kick** as SC *korner*, and **comic strip** as *strip*.

There are also hybrids in which the compound word is made out of English and SC elements: *kamp kućica* ‘camp house’, *kantri pevač* ‘country singer’, *najlon čarape* ‘nylon stockings’ (*vešplav*, from German), etc.

Loan translations also reflect lexical interference. This is a special type of borrowing in which the word is not borrowed whole but its parts are translated separately and in that way a new word or expression is formed. Compound words and/or phrases which come into SC from English are often in the form of loan-translations. Loan translations, words, and expressions reproduced in terms of equivalent or near equivalent native terms, are adapted to the morphological, syntactic, and derivational patterns of SC. Examples of loan-translations are many. The English **skyscraper** becomes *oblakoder* ‘cloudscraper’ in Serbian (*neboder* ‘skyscraper’ in Croatian). The English **money laundering** becomes *pranje novca* ‘washing of money’ in SC; the English **surfing** is reinterpreted as *jahanje na valovima* ‘riding waves’ in SC; the English **black hole** becomes *crna jama* ‘black pit’ in SC; the English **remote control** becomes *daljinski upravljač*, the English **test tube baby** is the same—*beba iz epruvete*; **lie detector** is *detektor laži*, **affluent society** is *društvo izobilja*, **doves** are *golubovi*, **hawks** are *jastrebovi*, **the iron curtain** is *gvozdena zavesa*, etc. All the elements of a compound word or a phrase can be translated, some can be translated and transferred in part. There are even cases when a word can be translated and transferred at the same time. Here, I have only the Italian example *cannobuldog*.

At times, the two forms, foreign and domestic, may coexist side by side for some time. This was in particular the case in Bosnia-Herzegovina, a transitional area between Serbian and Croatian. At a later stage, one form is usually dropped.

All along we have been talking about the adaptation of loan words into the phonological, morphological, and semantic systems of the language recipient. Some recent investigation suggests that the opposite process may have been occurring, that the language source is influencing the systems of the language recipient.

I would like to finish by pointing out attitudes toward loan words in the SC speaking area. As we know, certain policies that language planners adapt can either decrease or increase linguistic differences between the groups. Non-linguistic factors can influence the process and perception of lexical enrichment, borrowing in particular. The biggest difference between Serbian and Croatian is in lexicon, the result of different sources, different derivational suffixes, some historical incidence, and of course the attitude toward borrowing.

Serbs are always ready to accept loan words that represent internationalisms. Even though they were under Ottoman domination for a long time, their language was never threatened. As a result, they developed a more permissive attitude toward borrowings.

Croats, on the other hand, had a very different experience. A part of the Austrian cultural sphere, they went through periods of intense pressures—Germanization and Magyarization. As a result, they tend to prefer calques and loan-translations. It is well known that languages that were subject to pressures of assimilation develop puristic tendencies. Even so, Croatian adopted a great number of loan words from German, English, and other languages.

Both *laissez-faire* and a prescriptive attitude toward loan words, if extreme, can be negative. The former entails the loss of specificity, the latter the loss of alternatives. It also hinders understanding between cultures. No prescriptive measure, however, can prevent borrowing. It is estimated that every sixth man of this planet uses English to some extent. The world is truly becoming a global village.

