

False Anglicisms in Legal and Business English as a Lingua Franca (ELF): A Process of Back-borrowing

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Anglicisms and False Anglicisms

What is a false anglicism? As Furiassi (2003:122) has already noted, there is a vast amount of literature on anglicisms in other languages, but, regrettably, the same cannot be said about false anglicisms, due to a number of problems we shall try to analyze here, which concern (1) choice of the term; (2) definition and ambiguity in the use of some of the labels, (3) lack of connection between research in different languages, (4) typological problems, and (5) disagreement on attribution.

Choice of Label

The very first problem concerning research on false anglicisms is the very name of the phenomenon. Spence (1987) already refers to the lack of stability of the label, which tends to alternate between "false anglicisms" (Pratt 1997, Furiassi 2003), "false borrowings", or "pseudoanglicisms" (Gómez Capuz 1997/1998:63), pseudo-loans (*Scheinenlehung, Scheinanglizismen*), as used by German linguists, such as Carstensen (1980), Görlach (2002), etc., and "apparent anglicisms" (Serianni 1987, Fanfani 1991, Furiassi 2003).

Definition and ambiguity in some of the labels

In addition to the problem that "apparent anglicisms" may be used to apply to non-adapted anglicisms, as in Kishi (2007), the literature gives a number of contradictory definitions, all of them containing the idea of difference in meaning and "English appearance"; interestingly enough, the problem of unclear delimitation noted by Spence in 1987 is still observed by Furiassi in 2003.

Some authors define false anglicisms rather loosely, as items "coined in French through English components", such as Gómez Capuz (1997/1998:91), who also offers a more specific definition as "words of English appearance which do not exist with the same shape, grammatical category or meaning in any of the varieties of contemporary English" (1999:63-64, our translation). This definition, in our opinion, opens up the path for research, for it relies on a view of "varieties of English" which does not include non-native varieties, and certainly, not English as a Lingua Franca (hereinafter, ELF). A controversial issue is the "existence" or "non-existence" of the word in English, a problem already solved by the wealth of examples which are present in English, albeit with a different meaning. In some cases, such as the abovementioned by Gómez Capuz, the idea of different grammatical category is added, which expands the category to items such as *fashion* in Spanish with the meaning of "fashionable", as in *Ese vestido es muy fashion*, with a shift from noun to adjective. However, the question of boundaries

remains a problem, because all definitions mention the “difference in meaning”, but it is a fact (as already noted by Spence in 1997, that borrowings very seldom have *exactly* the same meaning as in the source language, given the fact that they are borrowed in very specific contexts. We might also add here that, the moment a word departs from its source language and enters another, it becomes subject to different influences concerning both meaning (due to the interaction with the already existing forms in the recipient language in the same subject area) and grammar (for example, it might acquire grammatical gender, as in the case of English words borrowed by Spanish, German or French, and such gender may vary, e.g. *holding* is masculine in Spanish, but feminine in Portuguese or Italian).

Perhaps the best definition of false anglicisms is that by Furiassi (2003:123), which combines all the previous definitions into the following “autonomous coinages which resemble English words but do not exist in English, or as unadapted borrowings from English which originated from English words but that are not encountered in English dictionaries, whether as entries or as sub-entries.”, and goes on to distinguish four types:

- compound ellipses: probably the widest category, it describes the result of a process by which an original multi-word expression in the source language, such as “personal computer” in English, loses one of its components, leading, for instance, to *personal* in Italian meaning “personal computer”. These are very frequent in Spanish, with *camping* meaning “camping site”, *planning* meaning “planning chart” or the oft-quoted *parking* meaning “parking site/lot”. The label is interesting because it offers a diachronic explanation for a seemingly incomprehensible phenomenon of semantic shifts (e.g. *camping* being a place in Spanish, as in *Veranear en un camping*, whereas in English it refers to the activity);

- autonomous compounds: these are items created in the receiving language, on the basis of genuine elements existing in the source language separately. Such is the case of *recordman* and *recordwoman* in Spanish, Italian, Portuguese or French, which do not exist in English as such (the corresponding English term is “record holder”);

- semantic shifts: these are words which by all appearances are English, but whose meaning is completely different. The traditional examples are *slip*, which in Italian or Spanish refers to male attire, whereas in English it is used by women, and *footing*, used in Spanish, French, Italian or Galician with the meaning of “jogging” in English. In some cases the semantic shift may be more traceable and interesting; for instance, *slip* in Spanish refers to male underwear, in Italian to swimming equipment (also male), and in French it may be male or female;

- other phenomena: within this category Furiassi includes small variations on the other ones, such as brandnames (*Carter*) and, most interestingly, what he calls “hybrids”. The latter are described as combinations of elements in the source and in the receiving language, such as *zanzara killer*. Unfortunately, this “hybrid” category does not explicitly distinguish between combinations of base forms or full words, such as *zanzara killer* or *machote man* (a humorous nonce-formation in Spanish) and cases where a source language suffix has become extremely productive in the receiving language: this is the case of *-ing* in French or Spanish, which is constantly leading to hybrid coinages, such as the well-established *puenting* in Spanish (for “bungee jumping”) or the *balconing* (the extremely dangerous—and often fatal—practice by hotel guests jumping from a balcony into the swimming pool).

Something that the reader will observe is that anglicisms in *-ing* may be difficult to classify, since in principle they may be compound ellipses, if the compound clearly exists in English (as with the case of *camping* or *parking* in Spanish, Italian or French);

semantic shifts, if the English meaning is different (*footing*); hybrids, if they are the result of applying the suffix to a local word (the Spanish *puenting* or the French *canaping*), or even genuine anglicisms, where the form can be found in English (*cocooning*). However, as we shall see in this chapter, this latter attribution may be complicated, because some of them may have been re-exported into English, and therefore it might be safer to draw the line and only consider genuine anglicisms those documented by lexicographical sources (such as the *OED*) before they were documented in the borrowing languages.

An added problem, which we will not go into here, is the implications of “falsehood”, since if something is a “false” anglicism, there must be somebody who says it is, and if something is an “apparent” anglicism or a “pseudo” anglicism, it must be “apparent” to someone. In other words, the labels (a) imply a value judgment, usually a negative one, and (b) usually fail to delimit *to whom* the word appears like an anglicism. Therefore, the issue of “falsehood” is rather a lexicographic and sociological problem, that is, the fact that the media or people in general consider the term an anglicism or not (for instance, see the study carried out by Erkenbrecher 2006). This has a number of sociological implications, because if the word is deemed to be “English” (certainly, the extreme success of *footing* is due to the fact that it *looks* English), it automatically acquires an aura of prestige that may extend its usage and, eventually, cause it to enter the allegedly original language if it is a lingua franca.

Lack of connection between research in different languages

Another of the problems in the study of false anglicisms is the ambiguity regarding the area of specialization; for instance, in some countries it is not clear whether they should be studied by those specializing in English linguistics or those specializing in the native language, i.e. those studying Spanish, Italian or French linguistics. The problem with the second approach, although it does make sense, is that it automatically isolates anglicisms in French from anglicisms in Italian or in Spanish, although they might well be the same ones and be caused by the same factors. Thus, there is ample mention of false anglicisms in Spanish, usually attributed to French (*autostop*, *pressing*, *smoking*, *footing*), by Gómez Capuz (1997/1998), and usually found in languages for specific purposes, as noted by Alcaraz (2000:58), Navarro (1997); however, it is frequently the case that studies on false anglicisms seldom quote the phenomenon in other languages. For instance, Furiassi exclusively refers to Italian, and in his review of the literature does not mention the seminal article by Spence (1987), probably because the latter only deals with French. The lack of connection between the domains is paradoxical, since false anglicisms are usually transferred from one language to another; in fact, all the studies admit that many are born in French, and yet do not have (like Furiassi) one single reference to anglicisms in French. In general, there are many studies on anglicisms in other languages mentioning false anglicisms, such as Portuguese (Santos 2006), German (Carstensen 1990, Hohenhaus 2001, Kovacs 2008, amongst others), but with notable exceptions, they usually do not refer to one another (one of the few common references in many of them is Görlach 2001, thanks to the fact that it is a joint effort by several European contributors).

Therefore, one of the practical implications is that, unlike other areas, all searches in the literature are extremely complicated by the fact that, not only is it necessary to search for various labels (false anglicisms, pseudoanglicisms, false borrowings), or discard those cases in which the previous labels are used in a different way, but also each search must be carried out separately in all languages. With notable exceptions (Görlach’s works) there is very little cross-languages awareness of a phenomenon

which, especially with the arrival of the Internet, has become a generalized one with multiple influences between languages.

The following problem, disagreement on attribution, is a result of this one.

Problems in attribution, documentation and sources

Another problem with false anglicisms, especially those entailing a semantic shift, is documentation and sources. For instance, “share” is listed in Italian by Furiassi (2003:132) as a false anglicism, for which the correct English form would be “rating”; however, there is a draft addition made in December 2008 to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, *share*³, which precisely gives that meaning, documented as early as 1974. The same applies to “spot”, considered a false anglicism in French (e.g. by Spence 1987, 1991), although examples can be found of “spot” as an advertising break in the 1980’s in English. As Spence (1987:168) points out, it may well happen that the word was a genuine anglicism (as is the case of *trapping* in French), but it belonged to specialist usage, and this is why the average English speaker (or general dictionaries) might not recognize it as an English word.

Borrowings in Legal English

Historically, legal English has received a number of borrowings from French and Latin, which have been extensively quoted in most studies (Mellinkoff 1963, Tiersma 1999, Alcaraz 2002); in the case of Latin, various studies (Kurzon 1987, MacLeod 1997, Mattila 2002, Balteiro & Campos 2010) have shown that Latinisms are still very much alive. However, most studies seem to imply that the influx from other languages has ceased, at least as far as legal language is concerned, because there is hardly any mention of recent borrowings in the literature.

Nevertheless, it is our contention that legal English is being steadily influenced by other languages, especially if we consider “international English” or “English as a Lingua Franca”, i.e. the variety of English used by non-native speakers in order to communicate with one another, especially in multilingual institutional settings, such as international bodies like the European Parliament, UNESCO, the European Court of Human Rights, etc, and especially on the Internet. In such settings, English words have been subject to semantic shift as a result of influence from other languages, especially French: for instance, the word “tribunal”, which in English referred to very specific courts (those dealing, for example, with industrial disputes) is used here with the meaning of “court”, as in the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), or the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS). Other examples are the word “chamber”, which is used in international legal English with the meaning of “division” of a Court (i.e. the First, Second Chamber of European Courts), and more recently, “magistrate”, which in legal English refers to a local judiciary official (a lay person) with limited jurisdiction in criminal case, used in international contexts for higher judges (i.e. “justices” in English), as in “magistrates of the Supreme Court” (as used by the International Criminal Court).

A few examples of “re-borrowing” or back-borrowing

Reborrowing is a process whereby a word is borrowed by language A from language B, but such word in language B was either borrowed itself from language A, and then changed its meaning, or did not exist in language A, but was coined in language B using elements from language A; in other words, the word was a false borrowing (or

pseudoloan) in language B from language A, and it eventually finds its way “back” into language A. The term is used by Steinbach (1984) concerning the word *Hamburger*, originally a German word which acquired its edible meaning in America, and then was “re-exported” into German with that meaning. Another interesting example is that of *walkman*, which was coined by the Japanese firm Sony for a portable cassette player in 1979 using two English elements (*walk* + *man*) and finally found its way into English as the generic term for all portable cassette players. Other examples of reverse loanwords are *sumo*, *judo*, *tsunami* and *kimono*, from Japanese into English, then acquiring a different meaning, and then re-exported with the new meaning into Japanese. The process is not exclusive of semantic shifts, and can even be found between English and Spanish with the word *fashionista*, coined in English using a native element (*fashion*) and the Spanish suffix *-ista*; the word is now becoming frequent in fashion circles in Spanish.

The problem for researchers is that some of the the countries where we might find false anglicisms which are then “re-exported”, such as. France, Italy or Spain, do not have a descriptive dictionary tradition, i.e. the fact that the word does not appear in pre-1976 editions of dictionaries in such countries does not mean that it was not used, but simply that it did not merit the approval of prescriptive dictionary makers at the language academies. Therefore, in this case the approach is merely synchronic, i.e., once the existence of a false anglicism related to legal and business usage has been verified in a language (French, Spanish or Italian), we have searched whether such “non-genuine” usage is present in English. The procedure in order to find them was introducing in Google special features. For example, for the countable use of “camping” as a site, items like “the/a camping in”, or the plural “campings” were introduced and checked both in sites written in English by native speakers of the language (in “inner circle” countries, that is, countries whose native language is English, such as Great Britain, the United States, Australia, etc.) and in sites written by users of English as L2 from countries not having English either as a native or official language (ELF’s “expanding circle”). Although initially one might react against the use of websites written in English by companies or individuals, since they are not necessarily representative of an established variety of English and occurrences may be attributable to lack of linguistic competence, it was still considered interesting to mention them, as examples of how items are used in the English as Lingua Franca context.

For practical reasons, we shall look at them depending on the type of false anglicism involved.

False anglicisms through compound ellipsis exported into English

In some European languages, such as Spanish, *catering* has been imported with the meaning of “food-providing service”, especially in the airline industry, as in French *Une entreprise locale spécialisée en catering* or Spanish *El catering de esa compañía es horroroso*, replacing other “traditional” terms, such as *mayordomía* in Spanish. Progressively, the term has been expanded to any event where food is provided, as in *El catering de una boda*, and has come to include not only the service, but also the provider, as in *Voy a llamar a un catering*, a meaning which was not originally present in English, and which we could consider a false anglicism of the compound ellipsis type (“catering service”). Some examples are beginning to appear of comparable uses in English, e.g. an American complaining in a forum that “the catering decided they couldn’t be bothered to cut it up”, closer to the false anglicism.

A similar case is *consulting*, which in Spanish, French or Italian is used with the meaning of the English word “consultancy”, as in *Ha sido despedido de un consulting en el que trabajaba* or *Il Consulting di Deloitte, con un fatturato globale di oltre 6,5 miliardi di dollari*; in English, at least according to the *OED*, “consulting” does not refer to the service (again, the false anglicism is based on the ellipsis of “service”). This usage is very frequent in English as a Lingua Franca, as in “I’ve already worked for a consulting”, but it has begun to appear in American English with a countable form, as in “TMB has recently hired a consulting to restructure the bank's human resource”.

Probably the best example of (re-)integration into English is that of *holding*, used in a number of languages (*Un holding italiana leader nel mondo della moda*, *Un holding de empresas*, *O Grupo Mar é uma holding que gere participações em várias empresas*), with the meaning of “a company that owns stock in other companies” which, in principle, in English corresponds to “holding company”. This is an item that has led to some controversy, and there are even bilingual dictionaries implying that “holding” can be used in English with the meaning of “holding company”. One wonders whether this would be a case of problems with documentation, because although neither the *OED* (in its 2010 online version) or other “academic” dictionaries contain that meaning, there are other online reference sources that do list “holding” in English as “a company owned by a holding company” (e.g. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/holding> or <http://www.websters-online-dictionary.com>, the latter in the “extended definitions” section), and one may find plenty of online examples of such usage, not only in ELF (“A holding that owns the following companies”), but also in outer circle pages (“The first interviewer was a woman, CEO of a holding, very nice and friendly”) and even, occasionally, in inner circle pages (“a holding providing insurance and annuity products”). It remains to be seen whether the pressure of hundreds of websites in which companies from non-English-speaking describe themselves as “a holding” may eventually lead native speakers to fully accept the new meaning of the term.

False anglicisms through autonomous compounds present in English

This category, which includes items created in the receiving languages based on separate elements existing in English, is best exemplified by the case of “hard discount”, which is used with the meaning of “shop selling goods priced below the average” in languages like French, Spanish and especially German, the “inventors” of such marketing strategy (“Wie lange Aldi Nord dieses klassische, so genannte Hard-Discount-Konzept noch durchhält, weiß niemand”); it is aptly labelled by the literature (e.g. Furiassi 2003) as a false anglicism, the allegedly “correct” form in English being “discount store” or “discount shop”.¹ A quick search, which is precisely facilitated by the fact that these shops have been set up in Britain, shows that the gates are already open, and at least the compound is used by native speakers in this particular context; in July 2010 the *Financial Times* included a news item headlined “‘Hard discount’ pioneer who co-founded Aldi”, and Nielsen uses the expression sparingly in its *Consumer Insights* online magazine. Although the item is used between quotation marks, the usage is already there, and it can certainly be found in specialized magazines (also www.retail-week.com), or applied to firms from English-speaking countries (such as the Irish clothing retailer Primark). Of course, ELF provides plenty of additional examples, usually by French authors or in websites from French companies (e.g. Carrefour).

¹ Interestingly enough, a search using the “define: xxxx” tool in Google offers definitions of “hard discount” in French or Italian, but not in English.

Compared to these success stories, other false anglicisms have not been able to enter the English language with such ease. A clear example of this is *renting*, an autonomous compound leading to a false anglicism in Spanish and Portuguese, applied to long-term vehicle leases including all services (as in *Nuestra empresa tiene una gran oferta de coches de renting*, or *No caso do renting, conta-se ainda com outro tipo de serviços, podendo-se mudar de viatura*), which would be “car lease” in English. In this case we have not been able to find any instances of such usage in English, neither in “native” pages (which feature “leasing” or “lease” as the option) or in pages written in English by non-natives. There may be reasons explaining this lack of success, especially when compared to the case of “hard discount”; probably the latter has found it easier to expand due to the absence of a clear English term, whereas in the case of *renting* there is already a term for the practice (and such practice was a long-established one in Britain, even before *renting* was popularized in Spain or Portugal).

False anglicisms through semantic shifts present in English

This category includes those words which do pertain to the English language, but whose meaning has suffered some kind of modification, either due to usage, or because they were borrowed in a very specific context. The best example is here furnished by “mobbing”, which is used in some European languages (as in Italian, *La Cassazione si è pronunciata sul difficile argomento del Mobbing sul lavoro*, or Spanish, *Ha denunciado a su empresa por mobbing*) with the meaning of “harassment at work”, which in principle is the term preferred in the English legal system (e.g. “Readers are recommended to read ACAS guide Bullying and harassment at work”). “Mobbing” was certainly a crime in English, corresponding to an old common law offence of forming a mob “engaged in disorderly and criminal behaviour”, however, its usage describing workplace harassment is rapidly expanding both in English as a Lingua Franca (it is a term widely used by the European Industrial Relations Observatory), and among native English speakers, especially in the United States, where it is becoming increasingly popular in academic circles (with titles like *The Envy of Excellence: Administrative Mobbing of High-Achieving Professors*).

Another usual candidate is *leasing* in Spanish, which is used with the meaning of “lease with an option to buy”, i.e. what is known in English as “financial leasing”. Although this could be considered an elliptical form (“financial” being the missing element), it is our opinion that this differs from items like *camping [site]* or *parking [site]* in that what is missing here is a modifier, not the core of the phrase, and also that “financial leasing” is a type of lease; therefore, it may be seen as a specialization or narrowing of the original form. In this case, the fact that it does not entail any morphological deviation from its original form makes it extremely easy to appear in British websites with the new meaning, as in <http://www.oltd.co.uk/>, and of course, in German or other pages written in English. However, it remains to be seen how this notion (an option to buy at the end of the lease) will coexist with the general concept of “car lease” in English, and whether any explanation or paraphrasis will arise to avoid confusion.

Another item half-way between compound ellipsis and semantic shift is *outlet* in Spanish or Italian, amongst others (*Me he comprado ropa de marca, pero en un outlet*, or *Il primo e unico vero outlet per prodotti xxxx in Italia su internet*), meaning “a shop, or group of shops, selling branded goods directly to customers at a lower price”; the usual word in English would be “outlet centre/store/mall”. As with the previous case, it may be seen as an ellipsis from a compound element, but also as a semantic shift, given that “outlet” in English already means “point of sale”. Whatever the category it belongs

to, it does seem that, as with the case of *leasing*, the fact that it is very close in meaning to an original element makes it very likely to appear also in English, both as *lingua franca* (“Welcome to our coach outlet online sale”) and by native speakers, especially in the United States (as in the site www.perfumeoutlet.net).

Conclusions

In the previous sections we have attempted to provide some new insights into the mutual influence between English and other languages, as regards the changing fortunes of words which either departed from English and were subject to morphological, syntactic or semantic changes before they returned to the language, or were born in other languages following English models and eventually found their way into English thanks to their creators’ ability to imitate the original models, which facilitated the integration of these words. As has been seen, the topic is a difficult one for a number of reasons, which include problems with definitions and labels, controversial attribution, etc.; apparently, although the notions seem to be clear, it is very difficult to trace exactly the stages a word has been through. Alongside with very clear instances of false anglicisms which eventually have been “adopted” by English, there are other items that may have been present in English all the time, in spite of the general impression that they were “reintroduced” from other languages.

It must be said that, especially in the case of false anglicisms due to compound ellipsis, it is difficult to know whether the appearance of the element in English is due to back-borrowing or simply a case of the same compound ellipsis taking place in English, not necessarily as a result of external influence. Also, it has been seen that there are some cases which may be difficult to classify within the existing categories in the literature, and that the borders between semantic shift and compound ellipsis may be fuzzy and subject to interpretation. Nevertheless, one initial finding we have made is that false anglicisms in this situation, such as *outlet* or *leasing*, seem to be suitable candidates for (re-)integration into English, as they can be viewed by native speakers as specialization of a previously existing word.

Another problem that remains is that of documentation, which affects especially those false anglicisms in which a semantic shift (or narrowing) appears to have occurred between English and the target language. As we saw earlier in the case of *share*, our consideration of what a false anglicism is should be always subject to new discoveries, just the same as any hypothesis on the origin of a species should be subject to review in the light of new information. And even in those cases, there will always linger the doubt, when the word appears in the source language, whether it was not a false anglicism, that is, whether the word did have the original sense in English, especially among specialized users, or whether it has been re-borrowed from the foreign one.

Indeed, the globalization of English, and the progressive empowerment of non-native speakers, may have interesting results regarding back-borrowing. For instance, we have not been able to find any cases of use of “antidoping” as a noun in English (in Italian, French or Spanish it is used for “dope test”, as in *Lo pillaron en el antidoping*). However, one can find occurrences in websites written in English by Italians (e.g. “Punishment for lack of cooperation to do the antidoping” or “the medicines making her unable to go through the antidoping”). One may wonder if the pressure of millions of Spanish, Italian or French speakers might cause “antidoping” to be used in English; indeed, the odd case of “campings” can already be found in websites hosted in Britain.

Whichever the case, one may conclude that ELF is very likely to be a major factor in the evolution and success of false anglicisms. On the one hand, the already mentioned pressure of two billion non-native speakers of the language, especially through the

digital media, may eventually have an influence on native speakers. On the other hand, the changing paradigms in English language teaching may very well lead us to stop viewing false anglicisms as a “mistake by non-native speakers”, but as either a natural evolution of the language or a perfectly acceptable proposal by one dialectal group, in the same way a word from a “native” dialect (such as Australian English or Estuary English) might expand to other varieties and gain widespread acceptance. Whichever the case, one may hardly doubt that the way English word-formation and semantics have evolved in the past will greatly change in the near future, and the globalization of English, and its use as a lingua franca, may probably influence these processes by blurring the barriers between languages.

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