

Major Tendencies of Lexical Borrowing from English to Oral Business Nepali: Implications for Translators and Language Teachers

Kamal Kumar Poudel¹ & Netra Prasad Sharma²

¹Mahendra Ratna Campus, Tahachal, Kathmandu, Tribhuvan University, Nepal

Email: *kkpoudel2023@gmail.com*

²Mahendra Ratna Campus, Tahachal, Kathmandu, Tribhuvan University, Nepal

Email: *tu.netrasharma@gmail.com*

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/researcher.v4i2.34611>

Abstract

In the present study, words and expressions from English used in Nepali while conducting business transactions orally were counted from a corpus comprising approximately 24,000 words using the "Navigation Pane" in the computer. A total of 875 English words including all repetitions were captured. Analyzing the contextual use-and-usage patterns of the English words from the data text, nine tendencies were identified: varying frequencies of the borrowed words; structural patterns of the loanwords; speaker-influence on hearer responses; brevity of the borrowed words/expressions; morphological simplicity; phonological deviation; borrowing as a need; borrowing as an option; and borrowing as a strategy of avoiding L₁ vulgarism or indecency. The implication drawn from the study is important for translators and language teachers: there is no point in artificially translating commonly used loanwords borrowed from English to Nepali in the name of preserving the purity of the Nepali language. Moreover, an area for the English teacher's focus of teaching is the phonologically deviated loanblends.

Keywords: Oral business Nepali, loanword, site, loanblend, interlocutor

Introduction

Borrowing is one of the well-articulated topics in the field of language contact. Yule (2008) defines it as "the taking over of words from other languages" (p. 54). It is common that mostly words are borrowed from one language to another, yet, not meaning to say that only words are borrowed from one language to another. As Lyons (2002) points out, borrowing also takes palce from grammar and phonology of other languages. Nonetheless, this article mainly concentrates on vocabulary borrowed by the speakers of Nepali from English when they were involved in carrying out business in and around business sites and hubs, mainly in open

¹ Mr. Poudel, principal author, Associate Professor (English Education)

² Dr. Sharma, corresponding author, Lecturer (English Education)

roadside stalls, canteens, ticket counters and public transports, garages and medicine centers. Interestingly, in most part of the study, it was found that the English words revealed some kind of phonological influence of the Nepali language on them.

In the present study, 875 English words amid Nepali words and expressions were obtained out of a corpus of approximately 24,000 words recorded in the field (business sites and hubs). This article sets out to analyze those English words used in oral business Nepali (OBN) with an aim of identifying the major borrowing tendencies, developing arguments out of the tendencies and, further drawing some possible implications from linguistic as well as pedagogic points of view. To be specific, the study is basically guided by the following research questions:

1. What linguistic tendencies do OBN-situated loan words depict?
2. What arguments can be derived from the tendencies?
3. What implications can be drawn from the findings?

Methodology

The main highlights of this section are what were counted as data; from where, whom and how they were collected; and the process in which they were analyzed.

Data collection

The following design was applied to the collection of the data.

Approach

The methodological approach underlying this study is qualitative, which, according to Howitt (2016), is “based on rich textual rather than numerical data” (Howitt, 2016, p. 534). In this study, the data were obtained in the form of words and texts, not in numbers or figures.

Data, participants and field

In this study, the key data were the loanwords from the English language used by adult Nepali speakers while naturally speaking in and around four business sites in Nepal—namely, Ilam, Dharan, Kathmandu valley and Pokhara—where Nepali was the medium of business transactions/communication. The market-based specific hubs, particularly, public transport, garages, bus counters, roadside stalls, general traders’, grocers’, wholesalers’ and snack-and-tea shops made the field for the data.

Instrument

An easy-to-handle audio recorder was used as the key instrument to record the oral expressions (utterances and conversations).

Tools

Some striking data were captured as field notes in a diary. Besides, memos were instantly prepared to preserve the context of the data. Later, as a different procedure, an open-ended questionnaire set was used to collect opinions from people, both business professionals and customers (see Appendix).

Data analysis

Just as the data were obtained in the form of texts, i.e. verbal data, a non-statistical, thematic-descriptive mode of analysis was followed. As the analysis process, the English words were entered into the “Navigation Pane” in the computer. Treating all repetitions as different words, a datasheet comprising 875 English loanwords was achieved. On a close examination of the datasheet, nine themes–tendencies of lexical borrowing from English to Nepali–emerged. They were then presented as appropriate in data boxes (see 'Results'). In this course, the memos were also utilized as the basis of re-costructing the contexts in which the data were functioning in the actual field of communication.

Results

The OBN data merged into nine thematic patterns labelled in this article as the 'tendencies' of lexical borrowing from English to Nepali.

Tendency 1: Varying frequencies

Out of the 875 English loanwords captured in OBN, some were more frequently used than others. Five of them from the highest frequency category and five of them from the lowest frequency category are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Highest frequency and lowest frequency loanwords

Most frequently used words		Least frequently used words	
Word	Frequencies	Word	Frequencies
Kilo	39	Automatically	1
Size	35	OMG!	1
Ticket	35	Draw	1
Colour	27	Facility	1
Kg	24	Thyroid	1

Although the English loanwords were most commonly located in the public transport sector, the most frequently used loanword was 'kilo' with a total of 39 frequencies. By contrast, five of the words which were least frequently used were 'automatically', 'OMG!' (oh, my God!), 'draw', 'facility' and 'thyroid'— each having a single occurrence (Table 1).

Tendency 2: Structural patterns of the loanwords

As a tendency, it was identified that monosyllabic short words such as 'bag' and 'dress', rather than disyllabic or polysyllabic ones, were used. Compounds involving two components were also commonly found. In such cases the components involved 'noun+noun' and 'adjective+noun' patterns, as exemplified below.

- Noun+noun: side bag, chicken curry, jeans pants, cotton item.
- Adjective+noun: mobile set, black tea, green tea, two hundred.

Similarly, the longest phrasal structure traced was a three word expression: 'made in Nepal'. Besides, two full sentential expressions were located, namely, 'Thank you' and 'I am not interested'.

Tendency 3: Speaker influence on hearer responses

Another tendency which was identified was that whether the hearer (H) chose an English loanword or its Nepali equivalent was highly determined by which word—English or Nepali—the speaker (S) spoke out. If the speaker used an English loanword, so did the hearer in his/her turn, and if the speaker used a Nepali word, the hearer did, too, in his/her turn. A typical example is presented below.

S: *Yesko price kati ho?*

H: *Yesko price....(0.4 sec.) 550.*

But,

S: *Yesko daam chai kati ni?*

H: *Yesko daam...(0.3 sec.) 850.*

In the first mini-conversation, the speaker (S) used the English loanword 'price', so the hearer (H) repeated the same word in his response, too. Conversely, in the second mini-conversation, the speaker (S) used the word *daam*, meaning 'price' in Nepali, and so did the hearer (H), also.

Tendency 4: Brevity of the borrowed words/expressions

It was observed that most of the loan words were short, single words, if not necessarily always monosyllabic ones. Some examples of such words included 'total', 'cabin', 'size', etc.

The speakers also used words clipped in the beginning of the full words/terms. Some examples of such words are 'Micro' ('microbus'), 'Night' ('night bus'), 'veg.' ('vegetarian'), etc. The interlocutors' preference of short and clipped words can also be understood as a tendency of economy of speech.

Yet, in some instances, compounding was also marked. The compounds included two words. Some examples from the data are 'discount rate', 'plastic cover', 'kiwi fruit', 'wholesale', 'businessman'. In some rare cases, compounds were found having one of the words from Nepali and the other from English. An example would be '*anda* curry' ('egg curry'). Interestingly, a rare-the only-phrasal expression traced in the data was 'Made in Nepal'.

Tendency 5: Morphological simplicity

Morphological simplicity was another tendency revealed by the OBN data. By morphological simplicity we mean the tendency in which non-affixed, base forms of words were used at large (Table 2).

Table 2 *Non-affixation tendency*

No.	Actually used word forms	Word forms referred
1.	teacher dress	teacher's/teachers' dress
2.	experience helper	experienced helper
3.	Confirme	confirmed
4.	half pant	half pants
5.	Trouser	trousers
6.	Pantie	panties
7.	Sunglass	sunglasses

As can be seen from Table 2, the suffixes –s (possessive) (1), –ed (adjective) (2), –ed (past participle) (3) and –s/es (plural marker) (1, 4, 5, 6 and 7) were fully omitted, thereby preferring to the simplicity of the word structures.

Tendency 6: Phonological deviation

Some data also reveal that the interlocutors deviated the words phonologically, showing an inclination towards the pattern congruity of the Nepali language. Data box 1 presents an example of such phonemically deviated loanblends.

Data box 1

time → *tyaam*, driver → *daaivar*,
gents' → *gens*, first → *fas/fasta*,
last → *laas/laasta*, toilet → *twaaillet*,
price → *praij* (as if 'prize'), change →
chen, taste → *tes*

In fact, the words in Data box 1 have common equivalents in Nepali (respectively, *belaa/samaya*, *chaalak*, *chhoraamaanchheko*, *pahilo/pahila*, *antim*, *shauchalaya*, *mol/daam*,

khuddraa, swaad). However, the interlocutors employed these words from English origin without a simple knowhow of their pronunciation in English, to the extent that they are rather unlikely to be intelligible to the native speakers of English. In other words, in using these words they seem to have put a 'forceful' effort of using English words. Two participants of this study have labelled this tendency of the interlocutors' as 'English-craze' (Participant 1), and 'imitation', and their own 'modernization' through 'Englishization' (Participant 3).

Tendency 7: Borrowing as a need

This tendency stands just opposite to Tendency 6. In this pattern, the interlocutors used the English loanwords because they were forced to do so without having their common equivalents in Nepali: those were the 'out there' words for them. Some of such commonly used English loanwords in OBN were 'coat', 'coke', 'mobile', 'seat', 'kilo/kg', 'table', 'bus', 'purse', 'thyroid', 'scooter'.

The participants have provided their opinions regarding the use of these words by potentially lowly educated/literate speakers of Nepali doing small business by roadside, in canteens, medicine centers, periodic market places, public transport, etc. These are those words which have no Nepali equivalents/forms (Participant 2/5). Participant 2 opines that it does not occur that these are English words. Participant 4 thinks that these words have already stagnated in Nepali. Participant 7, compares the use of those words with some Covid-19 terms which have been common to all—from a child to an illiterate elderly: corona, virus, lock down, isolation, quarantine, PCR test, etc. His argument is that, like the Covid-19 terms, they have naturally learned (acquired?) these words without even thinking that these were words from non-Nepali origins.

Tendency 8: Borrowing as an option

It was also found that the interlocutors used the loanwords as an option. In other words, they used them although some commonly used Nepali equivalents were also available at hand. A set of such loanwords are presented in Data box 2.

In this example (Data box 2), the words in *italics* are commonly found in Nepali. Despite this, the interlocutors preferred their English equivalents. These set of words depict a different tendency from Tendency 6 that, unlike those, these words are not largely deviated in pronunciation, so these are, at least, intelligible to the native speakers of English. Regarding this usage, Participant 6 opines that educated Nepali use such words. In Participant 9's opinion,

Data box 2

dar/bhaau→rate, *jammaa*→total,
ho/an/hunchha→yes, *chhaalaako*
peti→leather belt,
dalaali→bargain

these words have now become so assimilated with the Nepali speakers that at the moments they use them, they remain unnoticed to the usage: they are part of their habit now. However, Participant 8 thinks that the interlocutors use them to show themselves off as being educated, and partly because of the expansion of [their] use.

Tendency 9: Borrowing as a strategy of avoiding L₁ vulgarism or indecency

Amid the OBN data, it was also investigated that the interlocutors used English loanwords which would sound vulgar or offensive if used in their own language. Data box 3 depicts words which would sound, at least, embarrassing in Nepali, their own language.

Regarding the use of these words (Data box 3) recorded in OBN conversations, the participants have somehow similar opinions. Participant 1 views that if the Nepali equivalent words were used in public places or with someone unfamiliar, the interlocutors might feel a bit embarrassed. Similarly, Participant 10 typically opines that the interlocutors used these English words instead of using the Nepali equivalents to make [themselves] sound tactful, and so, used them to avoid the fear of being uncivilized.

Data box 3

underwear, pantie,
bra, girl/boy-friend,
love, toilet

Discussion

Nine major linguistic tendencies were identified out of the OBN data. In this section, those tendencies are first explained in the light of the relevant literature which fundamentally regards borrowing as a contact phenomenon.

Borrowing: a result of bilingualism

Bilingualism is often characterized as a cause of borrowing words and expressions from the donor language. When people in a given speech community are in contact with other language(s), by such means as communication and education, they are tempted to import words and expressions from the language(s). As Brown (1996) observes, the degree of bilingualism positively influences the degree of lexical borrowing. All of the tendencies mentioned above are somehow explicable in terms of the bilingualism of the speakers but three of them appear more apparently so: Tendency 3 ('Speaker influence on hearer responses'), Tendency 8 ('Borrowing as an option') and Tendency 9 ('Borrowing as a strategy of avoiding L₁ vulgarism or indecency'). Participant 1 also seems close to this explanation when he remarks, "In my opinion, educated people use such words (rate, total, yes, leather belt, bargain)". He further adds, "They are so used to these words that they feel as if they were no more English words".

Borrowing: a need

To Durkin (2020), one of the major motivations for lexical borrowing is the interlocutors' need. In some cases, it was overt that the interlocutors used English loanwords because they were the only option for them to use. As it was observed, they were using them in situ so spontaneously as if those were words from Nepali itself. Typically, Tendency 7 ('Borrowing as a need') and Tendency 9 ('Borrowing as a strategy of avoiding L1 vulgarism or indecency') were most closely associated with the interlocutors' need.

Participant 7 thinks that the English loanwords 'coat', 'coke', 'mobile', 'seat', 'kilo/kg', 'table', 'bus', 'purse', 'thyroid' and 'scooter' are words which are even not named in Nepali. By this, he means that communication would be blocked in their absence— meaning that they are their need, not a choice.

Borrowing: a mark of prestige

Researchers and scholars in language contact have identified that the prestige of the donor language is an influential motivation for borrowing. For example, Durkin (2020) views that borrowing occurs because "the donor language has prestige in the mind of the speakers of the recipient language" (p. 172). The concepts of 'mania' (Bista, 2011), 'charm and attraction' (Kandel, 2018) and 'craze for English' (Poudel, 2018) primarily advanced in the field of education in Nepal seem to be true in the context of general communication, too. It could commonly be observed that mostly educated people tended to use English loanwords and lowly educated people, tempted by English-prestige, attempted to follow them. In doing this, following Winford's (2020) view, the laypeople manipulated the borrowed words so that they conformed to the structural and semantic rules of the recipient language. This explains why they likely underwent the phonological deviations, or Nepalization, of many English words such as 'time', 'first', 'last', 'toilet', 'thyroid', 'change', 'gents', etc. resulting in Nepali English ('Nenglish?'). In this example, the words are more of loanblends than loanwords (see the next heading). Likewise, perhaps motivated by English-prestige, in many cases in this study 'English knowers' were found using the loanwords even when the Nepali equivalents of those words were commonly available (see Tendency 8: 'Borrowing as an option').

Loanwords: a classificatory perspective

Mott & Laso (2020) group borrowed lexes into two categories: pure loanwords and loanblends. According to them, pure loanwords are 'those that are adopted wholesale, with minimum changes in pronunciation and morphology', and loanblends are 'those that are adopted only partially' (p. 157). From these standpoints, Tendency 6 ('Phonological deviation') in the

pronunciation of the words 'price' →*praij*; 'change' →*chen*; 'time'→*tyaam*; and 'taste'→*tes* illustrate loanblends but most of the others (e. g. 'bag', 'mobile' 'leather belt', etc.) exemplify pure loanwords, though not perfect. Participant 5, as does Winford (2020), regards the loanblend tendency as 'imitation'.

Implications for Translators and Language Teachers

The findings have some implications for translators and Nepali as well as English language teachers in the Nepalese context. Borrowing is a natural phenomenon in the evolution of language. It stands out that the donor language (English in our case) will by no means replace or displace the recipient language (Nepali in our case) altogether through lexical borrowing alone unless syntactic borrowings are commonplace. Therefore, there's a little point, if any, in attempting hard to resist it. Like anyone else, language teachers and translators can't always walk alone. Then it is necessary that translators and Nepali language teachers do not overworry about the use of English loanwords in Nepali and failing in their attempt to save its purity –the flood is natural and will find its way itself after all. However, English teachers need to be aware that their students are very likely to have learned commonplace loanblends from their family, friends, community members and so on. Such loanblends are not intelligible to the users of English in the wider context, so their learning might not work in such a situation. What English teachers can/should do about it is identify the loanblends acquired by the learners and expose to and train them in the acceptable usages. Drill and practice might help in this respect.

Conclusion

The English loanwords borrowed while communicating in OBN by the speakers of Nepali emerged into a set of tendencies. Nearly all of those tendencies are explicable in light of the already worked out findings in the relevant literature. Those tendencies are found to have been motivated by borrowing-related sociolinguistic notions, mainly speaker needs, assimilation, commonality and simplicity of expressions, influence of bilingualism and education, language prestige, imitation, and nativatization (loanblending). The implication for translation and language teaching is that there's no point in attempting to resist lexical borrowing from English to Nepali because it is a natural process of language evolution. Yet, an area of practice for language teaching and learning would be the loanblends.

References

- Bista, K. (2011). Teaching English as a foreign/second language in Nepal: Past and present. *English for Specific Purposes World*, 1-9. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED530898.pdf>
- Brown, C. H. (1996). Lexical acculturation, areal diffusion, lingua francas, and bilingualism. *Language in Society*, 25, 261-282.
- Durkin, P. (2020). Contact and lexical borrowing. In R. Hickey (Ed.), *The handbook of language contact* (2nd. ed., pp. 169-179). West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.
- Howitt, D. (2016). *Qualitative research methods in psychology* (3rd ed.). Harlow: Pearson Education.
- Kandel, B. (2018). The charm and attraction of English language to Nepali students. *Discovery Dynamics*, 4(2), 1-11.
- Lyons, J. (2002). *Language and linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mott, B., & Laso, N. J. (2020). Semantic borrowing in language contact. In A. P. Grant (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of language contact* (pp. 155-172). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Poudel, K. K. (2018). An English language bridge course as a project outcome. *International Journal of Science and Research*, 7(12), 118-122.
- Winford, D. (2020). Theories of language contact. In A. P. Grant (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of language contact* (pp. 51-74). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Yule, G. (2008). *The study of language* (3rd ed.). New Delhi: Cambridge University Press.

Appendix

(Questionnaire translated from Nepali to English)

Name (optional):

Occupation:

Academic qualification:

Questionnaire

- 1) In your opinion, while doing business transactions in small market-places in Nepal, do the sellers and buyers need to use English words or not? Why?
- 2) Please study the English words given in the separate boxes below (A-D). Why, in your opinion, have the sellers and buyers in the small shops of market-places and roadsides in Nepal used these English words while doing business transactions?

A. Coat, coke, mobile, seat, kilo/kg, table, bus, purse, thyroid, scooter

Answer:

B. Rate, total, yes, leather belt, bargain

Answer:

C. Price→ *praij*, change→ *chen*, time→ *tyaam*, taste→ *tes*

(This symbol (→) indicates the exact pronunciation of the words the Nepali speakers followed)

Answer:

D. Underwear, pantie, bra, girl/boy friend, love, toilet

Answer:

3. In your opinion, what does the use of English by the common public Nepalese while speaking Nepali indicate?

Answer: