

SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON THE NEW LEXEME BEAU IN LINGALA

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Discussions of borrowing have tended to concentrate on phonological adaptations of the borrowed terms and/or semantic displacements of native terms effected by the borrowing. Little studied has been the question of the place of borrowed items in linguistic competence, defined as "the ability of a speaker to pair sentences with presuppositions relative to which they are well-formed or grammatical." The lexical item *beau* in Lingala is identified as probably having come from French *beau-frère* but takes on a function in Lingala identifiable by the features of AFFINITY, COLLATERALITY, and MALE. A full understanding of this term must also take into consideration its vocative or referential use and the degree of formality or joviality to be indicated between user and referent.

General Observations

Studying a new word, whether a borrowing or a coinage from the native lexical wealth of a given language, is actually nothing new in linguistic literature.¹ A look in the bibliography of such a classical work as Bloomfield's *Language* reveals to us that he was inspired by the works of nineteenth century scholars, including G. Hempl, R. Lenz, P. Grade, H. Schuchardt, A. Darmsteter, and H. Paul. Bloomfield's devotion of three chapters of his book to a survey of borrowings attests to how much this topic was of interest at his time.

However, we will note that up to the fifties and sixties studying borrowings essentially consisted in describing how much the morphology of the

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item has changed or remained the same, and in stating how much the meaning of the item has shifted (i.e., narrowed, broadened or was absolutely displaced). Associated with such names as Weinreich [1953] and Haugen [1953] is *inter alia* the interest in the analysis of the semantic and stylistic influence of the loanword on the native synonym if there is any, and/or of the particular stylistic and/or dialectal function(s) of the borrowed item itself. Even though Haugen [1953:9] states in "The Bilingual Dilemma" the following, it is important to note that he indeed does not still fully account for the actual behavior of the loanword in use in the host language.

"Languages differ not only in the specific terms they use for specific objects and actions; they differ even more in the kind of linguistic and social contexts in which these terms can be used. Even after one has mastered perfectly the grammatical situations, there are rigid limitations on the use of the terms to describe classes of objects."

This failure in the literature can easily be correlated with an established linguistic belief which up to now has not fully disappeared. In fact linguistic competence has been identified with the speaker's knowledge of the principles enabling him to produce formally "grammatical" sentences regardless of the communicative situation (with respect to the particular atmosphere, style of language, age and sex of speakers, and other factors characterizing the communicative event).

As hinted above, the traditional conception of linguistic competence and grammaticality, despite the reluctance of some to change attitudes, is in change. Since the late sixties, with works such as Lakoff [1971], Fillmore [1971a], Lakoff [1972], Keenan [1971], and others, such new notions as "relative grammaticality", "felicity/happiness conditions" and "presuppositions" have been in current use in linguistics. Of all we would particularly like to cite the following definition of linguistic competence by G. Lakoff [1971:330]: "the ability of a speaker to pair sentences with the presuppositions relative to which they are well-formed" or grammatical.

We actually believe that time has also come for those linguists interested in problems of language contact (the study of borrowings in the present case) to consider this extension of the notion of linguistic competence. In the present paper, the aim of which is the analysis of the borrowing *beau* in Lingala, we intend to sustain the above claim. We wish to lay more emphasis

on the actual socio-linguistic state and behavior of the loan in the host language rather than on *WHY* and *HOW* the borrowing was effected. Among the reasons for this shift of concern are: (1) the irrelevance (as we believe) of the knowledge of such details for the competence of the speaker, (2) the limitation of the scope of the paper.

Before giving those considerations we have gathered about the Lingala lexeme *béau*, we believe that a brief digression related to the linguistic and cultural situations of the subject matter as well as to some methodological specifications may be of some use.

According to Guthrie [1948], Lingala belongs to group C26. Its creolized form (LingalaC) has become one of the present *lingue franche* of Zaire,² and is spoken particularly in Kinshasa (the capital) and the surrounding area, along the whole central Zaire River (from Kinshasa to Kisangani), as well as in the whole northern part of the country. (In some other dialect of its own it is also the *lingua franca* of the army all over the country.) The dialect we will base our analysis on is the one known as Kibil, spoken essentially in Kinshasa (but also in other cities) by certain youth whose age varies from puberty to the late twenties or early thirties. Besides the lexical and morphosyntactic characteristics it shares with the other *lingue franche* of Zaire (we discuss them in the next paragraph), Kibil may be characterized by (1) more borrowings, (2) a lot of "expressive switching of codes", (3) its unstable lexical novelties, and (4) its quasi-solely oral form.

Like the other *lingue franche* of Zaire, LingalaC morphosyntax is known to be simplified in comparison with less widely used Bantu languages and its vocabulary is of various national and foreign origin. Its contact with Western civilizations and languages has its obvious linguistic marks in the flux of such words as *mesa*, *sabátu*, *mútuka*, *lopitálo*, *radiô/ladiô*, *perezidá/pelezidá*...³ some of which have been in use since the precolonial period

²The other *lingue franche* being Swahili (Bantu A. 42) Kituba (H 16) and Tshiluba (Bantu L 30).

³They are from *mean*, respectively: Portuguese *mesa* 'table', *sabato* 'shoe', English *motor car*, French *hôpital* 'hospital', *radio* [Radjo] 'radio', *président* [pRezidã] 'president'.

probably, some others (like the last item) since not long ago. Some of the words parallel African contact with new cultural realities, whereas some of the borrowings are harder to explain in terms of cultural novelties.

This, we suspect, may be the case of the new lexeme beau (as of many other such words as místa, másta, sheríf, gueter?⁴) to which some of the rather conservative elderly speakers have not unfrequently reacted with some contempt. Beau, as we will discuss it below, is essentially a word of Kibil (though it may be heard in the standard form of LingalaC as a case of "expressive code switching"). It is a kinship term, and is thus related to one of the most central and traditional socio-cognitive domains.

In the present study we wish to distinguish between the "referential use" of the term (by which the term is used solely to fix the referent) and the "vocative use" of a term (by which the speaker not only fixes the referent but also summons this referent as the addressee in the communicative act).

We will also use the following convention: Ɔbeau to refer to the French lexeme beau, brother to refer to the English lexeme brother, and ɓbeau to refer to the LingalaC lexeme beau. The orthography used here for the Lingala/Kibil loanwords is actually our own and we do not know of any standardized orthography of these words so far.

2. Identification of ɓBeau

It is undeniable that the socio-cognitive position and the morphophonology of ɓbeau (as for the very sounds involved as well as the CVCV syllabic structure, quite typical of LingalaC) do not lead to the conclusion that the word is a borrowing. However, the following few arguments seem to support that it actually is a borrowing.

(1) None of the written records available to us lists either this form or its kindred: Guthrie [1966] gives only the entry boklló to cover both the spouse's relative and SpPa⁵, of which only the former overlaps with the

⁴These are from English mister, master, sheriff and French gueter. They mean respectively: 'pal/person whose behavior is appropriate for a group of pubers', 'father', and 'you see?' (colloquial).

⁵We mean by "relative" non-parental member of the family. We will often use the following abbreviations, common in anthropological linguistics, to

semantic domain of p_{beau} . Blavier [1958] lists two separate entries of which bokllo covers only SpPa while monyala, equivalent with LingalaC seméki, covers spouse's relative. Guthrie [1967] enters the stems bo 'they, them', bu 'mosquito', and bu 'soil' which we find hard to relate with the kinship term beau in LingalaC.

(2) Awkwardly enough, French, with its intellectually prestigious position in Zaire as the language of the intelligentsia as well as the official language, offers five items which are (initially) identical (at least phonetically) with p_{beau} : beau [bo] 'beautiful, handsome', beau-frère (Sp-Br, SiHu), beau-fils (DaHu), beau-père (spFa), beaux-parents (SpPa).

It may not be unnecessary to note that the phonetic word [bo] is used under exactly the same felicity conditions in slangish versions of Kituba and Swahili, calling also for the same "contemptive reaction of the rather conservative elderly speakers" pointed above. Because of the coincidental prestigious position of French in Zaire and of the presence of the five lexical items noted above in this language, the hypothesis of the possibility of LingalaC, Kituba and Swahili borrowing the word from their European counterpart seems preferable to the possibility of one of them lending it to the others.

Under that hypothesis, we face the problem of determining which of the French words is the model for the loan. Let us quickly point out that with the exception of p_{beau} , all the others are kinship terms.

p_{beau} [bo], is homophonous with p_{beau} [bo], is an adjective, as in (1):

- | | | |
|-----|----------------|---------------|
| (1) | beau garçon | beau bébé |
| | 'handsome boy' | 'pretty baby' |

It is sometimes used as a substantive, as in (2) and (3), and has a special connotation which may be complimentary or ironical depending on the specific context of its use. While it is a nickname in (2), it is a surname in (3):

- | | |
|-----|--|
| (2) | Bien sûr, Monsieur le Beau y sera. |
| | 'Of course, Mr. Handsome will be there' |
| 3) | Charles le Bel était Roi de France. |
| | 'Charles le Bel (the handsome) was King of France' |

shorten our descriptions of kinship relations: Br = brother, Da = daughter, Pa = father, Hu = husband, Pa = parent, Si = sibling, So = son, Sp = spouse, Wi = wife. The first term possesses the second, e.g. SpPa = spouse's parent, DaDaHu = parent's daughter's husband.

Although this pbeau has been borrowed in Kibil, it should be pointed that:
 (a) it is *not* a kinship term; (b) it is borrowed with the article, with which it may be assumed to make one single morphophonological string / lebó / as in (4) and (5), whereas the Kibil beau / bó / is only a two-segment word.
 (c) Lbeau has the same denotative meaning as pbeau and is also endowed with the same connotations of irony and compliment in (4,5) (though situational contexts, the paralinguistic means of intonation and others, surely, contribute to the expression of these connotations); (d) as it will appear below, Lbeau and Lbeau have different sociolinguistic behaviors.

- (4) $\overbrace{\text{Ye nkutu}}$ $\overbrace{\text{lebeau!}}$ (Ironic tone)
 him above all the handsome
 'Of course, everybody knows he is Mr. Handsome himself!'
- (5) $\overbrace{\text{Tala}}$ $\overbrace{\text{lebeau!}}$
 look (Imper) the handsome
 'You really (do) look handsome + TIME!'

In such a non-native-like utterance as (6) the co-occurrence of the transferred French adjective beau with Lbeau is far from being ungrammatical:

- (6) $\overbrace{\text{Beau}}$ na $\overbrace{\text{ngái}}$ azalí $\overbrace{\text{beau}}$ té
 SpBr connec- me Mod+be handsome Neg
 SiHu tive
 'My brother-in-law is not handsome.'

With this last case we may exclude the possibility of pbeau being the model for Lbeau .

If Lbeau has been borrowed on the model of either pbeau-frère , pbeau-fils , pbeau-père or pbeaux-parents , then it is also very likely that it has undergone a truncation anterior or subsequent to the borrowing. Truncation may be asserted to be common enough in many languages. Although we have no evidence of the truncated use of the above words in Belgian or French French, we observe the following other cases anyway: *dactylographe*, *radiographie* have been currently shortened into *dactylo*, *radio*, and in English *lab*, *phone*, *specs*, *plane*, *fridge* are truncated forms from *laboratory*, *telephone*, *spectacles*, *aeroplane*, and *refrigerator*. Swahili, to mention a Bantu language, offers *sonner*, which Polomé assumes to have been truncated

from pklaxonner ⁶ (in a process, we assume, similar to the hypothesis under consideration). And in Lingala itself the following few truncated forms may be attested: $(\text{Kfm})\text{Tail} < \text{Tailleur}$, $\text{K'In} < \text{Kinshasa}$, $\text{Yaa Geo} < \text{Yayá Georges}$.

The truncation hypothesis is then not implausible, not even the possibility of its application after the borrowing in Lingala. But still we have to determine which of the four words is the model.

While pbeau-père , beau-fils and beau-parents designate lineal relations, Lbeau refers to collateral ones. Other features in Lingala kinship may also be noted. (a) Sons and parents-in-law entertain avoidance relationships and their contacts are strictly formal. These factors do not seem compatible with the jovial contexts in which Lbeau occurs. (b) Children and parents-in-law address each other as papa or mama according to whether the addressee is respectively male or female, and these terms connote both familiarity and respect rather than familiarity mixed with a mood of joviality as connoted by the use of Lbeau . (c) LBeau alternates with another truncated cognate Lbeauf under the same felicity conditions and shares with the latter the same socio-linguistic connotations, namely, it is used in (very) informal contexts and it connotes familiarity, intimacy and joviality. (d) In formal context Lbeau is replaced by not only the native term seméki but also by its other cognate beau-frère more commonly heard in the speech of French-native language multilinguals.

On account of the above it does not seem unjustified to assume that Lbeau has pbeau-frère as model.

3. Sociolinguistic Behavior of LBeau

We will hold here to the same contrastive approach used above for the identification of Lbeau . We will first compare the item to its French model and then to its Lingala (quasi-) synonyms beauf , seméki , beau-frère .

pBeau-frère covers the following kinship relations: HuBr , WiBr and

⁶This example is cited from Polomé [1968:16]. We will, however, note that there also exists in French a verb sonner 'to ring (a bell)', which shows little semantic distance from klaxonner 'to blow the horn' (automobile).

SiHu, the common semantic features of which may be +MALE, +AFFINITY, +SIBLING. It is used mostly referentially as in (7) which, in contrast with (8), implies that the speaker insists on specifying to his addressee the particular kinship relation that links him to the referent of beau-frère .

- (7) Mon beau-frère sera absent ce soir.
'My brother-in-law will be out tonight.'
- (8) Jean sera absent ce soir.
'John will be out tonight.'

Its occasional vocative use seems formal. Assuming a dimension of "social distance" (as in Gumperz [1971] quoting from Roger Brown), the English and French vocatives (9)-(11), in which (9) shows the most distance and (11) the least distance, suggest that there is not much intimacy achieved in using kinship term or title instead of the first name.

- (9) (Mon Cher) Monsieur Dupont,
'Dear Mr. Thompson:'
- (10) (Mon) Cher beau-frère,
'Dear Brother-in-law:'
- (11) (Mon) Cher Jean,
'Dear John:'

There are no constraints whatsoever in its usage with respect to the speaker's sex or age, nor with respect to the circumstantial context of its use, whether formal, humorous, and the like.

The sociolinguistic behavior of L_{beau} diverges in many respects from its model. It covers a larger conceptual domain, the enumeration of the categories of which we will close with a period. Besides the kinship relations H_{br}, WiBr and SiHu, it also covers such relations as SpPaSo, SpPaSbSo. This appears to be in accordance with the conditions underlying the Lingala use of the referential frère or its native near synonym ndeko ya mobáli. Consequently, the relational feature SIBLING posited for beau-frère will be replaced by a less restricted feature COLLATERALITY, while the features MALE, AFFINITY will be maintained. On account of ethnical variations as to which kin to designate as frère, ndeko ya mobáli, hence as L_{beau} , we may assume the following rule:

- (12) If an individual x may be referentially designated as Lfrère in relation to y, then x may be designated as Lbeau in relation to z if z is y's spouse (or y's SpSb ...).

As specified in the introduction, its users are restricted. So are the actual contexts in which it can be used. A father-in-law informing his children of the arrival of his son-in-law can use (13) or (14) but would sound funny using (15):

- (13) Seméki na bínó akoyâ lóbí.
SiHu Con. you Mod+come tomorrow
'Your brother-in-law is coming tomorrow.'

(The appropriate English version should be: "John is coming tomorrow.")

- (14) Beau-frère na bínó akoyâ lóbí.
SiHu Con. you Mod+come tomorrow
'Your brother-in-law is coming tomorrow.'

- (15) *Beau na bino akoya lobi.

Its use is strictly informal and jovial, though connoting intimacy and familiarity. It is consequently precluded from formal talks, hence from the kinds of talks a father usually has with his children in the community concerned here. It is used mostly vocatively. Its referential use, as in (16), is restricted to one of the two members of the (symmetrical) relation.

- (16) Beau ayé! (out of excitement)
SiHu Mod+come
'My/Our brother-in-law has come!'

(The appropriate English version would again be: "John has come!")

In terms of social distance, the French/English scale seen in (9)-(11) is reversed. Thus, while (17) is the most formal and distant and (18) only achieves some relative intimacy, (19) implies not only intimacy, but also familiarity, joviality and cordiality.

- (17) Káíalá akoya.
Mod+come
'Kalala will come!'

(As corresponding to the English: "My/Our brother-in-law will come.")

- (18) Seméki akoyâ.
SiHu Mod+come

'My brother-in-law will come!

(Corresponding to the English: "John will come.")

- (19) Beau akoyâ. (informal)
SiHu Mod+come

'My/Our brother-in-law will come!

(Also corresponding to the English: "John will come.")

LBeau thus extends a social gesture that beau-frère does not achieve. It even becomes more indexical by its being associated with a special informal talk, proper to a generation and virtually male exclusive with respect not only to the sex of the referent but also to the sex of the speaker. For reasons so far unknown to the writer and according to our informants, it seems that females do not use LBeau in their talks, unless they want to sound "crazy" or want to produce some expressive effect.

In all the above respects LBeau , as was said above, alternates freely with Lbeauf .

LBeau differs from Lbeau-frère first in the fact that the latter ignores the formal vs. informal distinction and occurs in any context. Secondly, they are different in that Lbeau-frère does not know any restrictions with respect to the age or sex of the speaker. Thirdly, they also differ in the fact that Lbeau-frère lacks the connotations of joviality, familiarity and intimacy (as a matter of degree) usually associated with LBeau . However, Lbeau-frère is subject to rule (12) in its use.

LBeau designates half of the semantic domain covered by its native near-synonym *seméki*, since in the latter the sex dimension becomes irrelevant. In other words, the semantic conditions underlying the use of Lseméki may be posited as AFFINITY and COLLATERALITY. This gives the impression that the need to differentiate the sex of the referent justifies the presence of *beau* in Lingala. This simply is wrong, since Lingala usually specifies the sex dimension by apposition of either *mobáli* 'male' or *mwási* 'female' to any kinship term that does not incorporate the sex dimension in it. LBeau and Lseméki differ in the speaker's age and sex restrictions as well as the formal vs. informal situation restrictions, which Lseméki ignores. Like Lbeau-frère , Lseméki is not associated

with any connotative power of the kind associated with Lbeau , except for the relative intimacy achieved in its use. Sentences (17)-(19) locate clearly enough the position Lseméki has in the "social distance" scale; and in this sociolinguistic position it can freely alternate with Lbeau-frère . Sentences (20)-(24) below intend to show that, while achieving a higher degree of familiarity than Lseméki , Lbeau might also be subject to some syntagmatic constraint: it does not seem to accept nominal apposition. (Other linguists more fluent in and/or familiar with the Lingala dialect of Kinshasa may want to check this.)

- (20) Seméki, nsango níni?
SiSp/siSb news Wh-Q
'_____ how are you?'

(More approximately: "John: how are you?" We were told that "Brother-in-law: how are you?" would sound funny and sarcastic in English.)

- (21) Seméki Kálala akoyâ.
SiHu Mod+come
'((My)? brother-in-law) Kalala will come.'

- (22) Seméki Kálala, Ngalula azóbénga yô.
SiHu(+MALE) (-MALE) call you
'Kalala, Ngalula is calling you.'

(Again, according to our English informant, starting this sentence with 'brother-in-law' vocatively used would sound funny, unless it is intended to be specific, (say) by opposition to another individual named Kalala and who may take himself as the addressee.)

- (23) ?Beau Kálala akoyâ.
'Kalala will come.'
- (24) ?Beau Kálala, Ngálula azóbénga yô.
'Kalala, Ngalula is calling you.'

4. Tentative Definition of Lbeau

In the light of all that was said above we will try below to somehow organize those conditions that we assume to be relevant for the proper use of Lbeau . We will make a distinction between those conditions or features that linguists have so far considered semantic and the rest of our felicity conditions that we may roughly identify as presuppositional.

Since semantics as such has not been the primary concern of the present paper, the description we give below is nothing but a gross one aiming at specifying the type of conditions that could be met anyway.

We assume that $\text{L}\overline{\text{beau}}$ is underlain by the semantic conditions AFFINITY, COLLATERALITY and MALE. AFFINITY implies kinship involved through marriage whereas COLLATERALITY specifies that only the collateral relatives of the spouse are involved in this relation. We do not think that the specification of such features as HUMAN would actually be necessary. Indeed, we believe it would be redundant, since it is presupposed by the kinship feature; AFFINITY and COLLATERALITY already, the kinship relation being solely a practice of mankind (to our knowledge).

In Lingala the item $\overline{\text{beau}}$ indeed covers the semantic domain including the kinship relations SpBr, SiHu, SpPaSo, SpPaSiSo, PaDaHu, PaSiDaHu ... in accordance with rule (12). Its use is mostly vocative. Even when it is used referentially (occasionally), it assumes that the speaker is the other member of the relation so designated. It is more commonly used by male speakers ("male exclusive"). In vocative use it is normally the elder member of the relation that initiates the address. More than intimacy, it connotes familiarity, joviality and cordiality, and its proper use presupposes a good feeling of mutual friendly understanding between the two members thus related. Its use is also limited to informal talk. In its syntagmatic relations it seems to reject any nominal apposition whether in referential or vocative use.

Only when none of the above felicity conditions is violated can we consider the use of $\overline{\text{beau}}$ in Lingala grammatical or correct and in accordance with George Lakoff's definition of linguistic competence above.

5. Conclusions

In this paper we have first tried to demonstrate that (a) $\text{L}\overline{\text{beau}}$ is a loan from French, and (b) if it is so, it has been maintained in Lingala dialect of Kinshasa in a truncated form, which alternates freely with another truncated cognate $\text{L}\overline{\text{beauf}}$. $\text{L}\overline{\text{Beau}}$ is used in an obvious sociolinguistic complementary distribution (though overlapping) with its other cognate $\text{L}\overline{\text{beau-frère}}$ and its native near-synonym seméki . It has not had any effect on the sociolinguistic behavior of the native term but has,

instead, become heavily marked to the point of being quite indexical (carrier of what Gumperz [1971:124] calls "social meaning"). From a strictly semantic point of view, it is important to note that it has joined the class of the few kinship terms that have the sex dimension incorporated in them: namely, *papá* 'father', *mamá* 'mother', *mobáli* 'male/husband', and *mwási* 'female/wife'. By opposition to other kinship terms for which sex is specified by apposition of *mobáli* 'male' or *mwási* 'female', it confirms the arbitrariness/relativity with which the configuration(s) of semantic features that parallel a thought are incorporated into single or combinations of lexical items. Thus $\text{L}_{\text{seméki ya mobáli}}$ and L_{beau} designate the same referent if used in the same circumstantial context.

ADDENDUM

We have insisted on the importance of presuppositional features in this paper. It is simply because we believe that the semantic features, which underlie a lexical item, though absolutely necessary, are far from being sufficient for the appropriate use of words, nor for the proper understanding of other speakers [Fillmore 1971b:274-5]. They can account neither for the stylistic variations in the language use, nor for indexical use of words, as is the case for L_{beau} . In relation to this we may mention a definition of language by Goodenough [1964:37]: "whatever it is one has to know in order to communicate with its speakers as adequately as they do with each other and in manner they will accept as corresponding to their own."

Two facts have particularly struck us in this definition:

(a) It allows for consideration of those factors which have traditionally been considered as non-linguistic and which therefore have had to be excluded from any kind of linguistic description.

(b) It considers linguistic knowledge or competence as active or in use rather than as passive cognition.

In other words, we may sum up our complaint by pointing out the incompleteness of many lexical descriptions which have contented themselves with the specification of the strictly semantic conditions under which the item described should be used. Linguists may not mind welcoming this complaint, which in fact is not the first.

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