

SOUND SUBSTITUTION AND MODIFICATION IN BORROWING

Ruziev Khusniddin Bakhritdinovich*Termiz State University Teacher of the department
of English language and literature*

Abstract: This article examines sound substitution and modification in borrowing foreign words. It shows how consonants, vowels, syllables, and stress are adapted to fit English phonology. Examples illustrate these changes, ensuring borrowed words are pronounceable and integrated.

Keywords: Sound, Substitution, Modification, Borrowing, Phonology, Consonant, Vowel, Stress, Syllable, Adaptation

When foreign words are borrowed into a language, one of the primary aspects of phonological adaptation is sound substitution and modification. These processes are necessary because the sounds of the source language may not exist in the borrowing language, or they may be difficult for native speakers of the borrowing language to pronounce. Through sound substitution and modification, these foreign words are made more accessible and easier for speakers of the borrowing language to pronounce, all while attempting to maintain the original meaning and function of the term.

1. Sound Substitution

Sound substitution occurs when a sound in the borrowed word is replaced with an equivalent sound from the borrowing language's phonetic inventory. This is often done to make the word conform to the phonological structure of the target language, where certain sounds may be absent or pronounced differently. The choice of substitution depends on the phonetic similarities between the original sound and the substitute sound in the borrowing language.

Consonant Substitution

Consonants that are not found in the borrowing language are often replaced with the closest equivalent from the target language. This can involve the substitution of a consonant that has similar manner of articulation, voicing, or place of articulation.

- Example: The Spanish word "jalapeño" has the "j" sound, which is pronounced as a voiceless palatal fricative in Spanish (/x/), but in English, this is often replaced by a voiceless glottal fricative (/h/), resulting in the anglicized pronunciation /ˌhɑː.ləˈpeɪ.njoʊ/.

- Example: The French word "genre" is pronounced with a /ʒ/ sound, which corresponds to a voiced postalveolar fricative in French, but in English, it is commonly substituted with the /ʒ/ or /dʒ/ sound, as in /ˈʒɒnrə/ or /ˈʒɑːnrə/.

Vowel Substitution

In addition to consonants, vowels that do not exist in the borrowing language may also be substituted with similar vowel sounds from the target language. This often occurs in languages that have different vowel inventories.

- Example: The German word "über" (meaning "over" or "above") contains the /ü/ sound, which does not exist in English. It is typically anglicized as /'u:bər/, with the /ü/ sound replaced by the English /u:/ sound.

Final Consonant Substitution

Final consonants that do not exist in the borrowing language can be substituted or omitted altogether. For instance, in languages like French or Spanish, final consonants are often not pronounced or are pronounced more softly than in English.

- Example: The French word "ballet" is often borrowed into English with the "t" silent, becoming /'bæleɪ/, where the final consonant /t/ is omitted for ease of pronunciation.

2. Sound Modification

Sound modification refers to slight alterations in the pronunciation of the original borrowed word to accommodate the phonological rules of the borrowing language. Unlike sound substitution, which involves replacing a foreign sound with a native one, sound modification typically retains the original sounds but alters them slightly to fit the phonological system of the target language.

Consonant Modification

When foreign consonants are too difficult to pronounce or do not exist in the borrowing language, they may be modified to make them more pronounceable. This modification can involve changes to the articulation of consonants to align with native phonetic patterns.

- Example: The German word "Wagen" (meaning "car" or "wagon") contains the /w/ sound, which in German is pronounced as a voiced labiodental approximant. In English, this is often modified to a /v/ sound, so the word becomes /'wɑ:gən/ or /'vɑ:gən/ depending on the speaker.

- Example: The Italian word "piano" (meaning "smooth" or "flat") is borrowed into English, where the "p" sound is pronounced with greater aspiration than in Italian, and the final "o" is pronounced as a long vowel, leading to the anglicized pronunciation /pi'ænəʊ/.

Vowel Modification

Vowel modification occurs when the original vowels in the borrowed word are changed to resemble the vowel inventory of the borrowing language. This may happen when the target language lacks certain vowel sounds or has a different quality for the same vowel.

- Example: The French word "beau" (meaning "beautiful") has the /o/ sound, which does not occur in English as a pure vowel sound. In English, this is often modified to the /ou/ diphthong, resulting in the anglicized pronunciation /bou/.

Syllable Structure Modification

Languages often have particular preferences for syllable structures. For example, some languages allow complex syllable structures, while others favor simpler ones. When words are borrowed from a language with a more complex syllable structure into one with simpler syllable structures (such as English), these borrowed words may undergo modifications to make them fit the target language's syllable structure.

- Example: The French word "croissant" is pronounced /krwa:sɑ̃/ in French, but in English, it is often pronounced /krwa:sant/ or /krwəsant/, with syllables simplified and nasal sounds removed.

3. Other Modifications: Stress Shifts

In some cases, borrowing languages will modify the stress patterns of foreign words to align with their native stress patterns. The stress can shift from one syllable to another when words are borrowed, especially when the original stress does not fit the target language's typical stress patterns.

- Example: The Latin-derived word "record" is stressed on the first syllable when used as a noun (/ˈrɛkɔːrd/), but as a verb, the stress shifts to the second syllable (/rɪˈkɔːd/). English also borrows many words from French and Latin where the stress pattern differs.

4. Impact of Linguistic Factors on Sound Substitution and Modification

The nature of sound substitution and modification depends on several linguistic factors:

- The degree of phonetic similarity between the sounds in the source language and those in the borrowing language.
- The phonological structure of the borrowing language, which may favor certain sound combinations or syllable structures.
- The historical context of the borrowing, as older borrowings may have undergone more significant phonological changes compared to newer borrowings.

Sound substitution and modification are key aspects of the phonological adaptation process in borrowing foreign words into a language. These processes ensure that borrowed words are not only pronounceable but also fit within the phonological and phonetic system of the borrowing language. Over time, these modifications become part of the language's lexicon, and the borrowed words may no longer be recognized as foreign to native speakers. As languages continue to interact, these processes play a crucial role in linguistic evolution and the integration of foreign elements into the native language system.

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