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Ramón Martí Solano

Running head: Multi-word loan translations

Introduction

A loan translation is a means that natural languages have to increase their lexicon by borrowing, translating and adapting a foreign word into the recipient language. In this sense, loan translations are considered as neology. This can be done in various ways resulting in a number of adaptations known as loan translations proper, loan renditions and loan creations (Weinreich 1953: 51; Görlach 2003: 62).

Multi-word loan translations or phraseological calques have been widely studied in the areas of languages in contact and bilingualism. Two well-known examples are represented by the influence of English on French for speakers of Canadian French and the influence of English on Spanish in Latin-American communities in the United States.¹

- (1) Vous êtes drôle... Dommage que Greene soit mort, je vous aurais présenté... Ce n'est pas votre tasse de thé ? Ah bon... Remarquez, je n'y connais pas grand-chose. Cela dit, y a-t-il une vie plus passionnante que la nôtre ? Sincèrement ?
(Sollers Ph., *Le Secret*, 1993, p. 53)

¹ For the influence of English on Canadian French, see Jean-Louis Darbelnet, *Le français en contact avec l'anglais en Amérique du Nord*. As for the influence of English on U.S. Spanish, see Ricardo Otheguy, *A reconsideration of the notion of loan translation in the analysis of U.S. Spanish*.

Ce n'est pas ma tasse de thé (< 'it's not my cup of tea') is a stereotypical example of the influence of English phraseology on French as illustrated in (1). The phrase is highly institutionalised and therefore quite familiar among French speakers. However, it is rarely found in written corpora as it is more frequently used in speech than in written form—only three occurrences of this phrase have been found in the French general corpus *Frantext*.

On the other hand, multi-word semantic borrowings or phraseological semantic loans constitute another way of enriching the recipient language by means of borrowing a new figurative sense or developing a semantic extension for an existing lexicalised string in the recipient language as is the case with *trou noir* (< 'black hole'):

- (2) Les militaires français, qui s'y sont déployés en 2008, décrivent souvent cette région comme un «trou noir» qui avait selon eux été négligée auparavant car située à cheval sur deux zones du commandement militaire des forces internationales, celui de Kaboul et de l'est afghan. (*Le Nouvel Observateur*, 28 December 2010)

The use of inverted commas in (2) signals the phraseological awareness on the part of the journalist of the new sense of the existing French multi-word unit. The present study is therefore concerned with the influence of English multi-word units on journalistic discourse in France.

1. Influence of English phraseology on French: a historic outline

Loan translations and semantic calques can be at times difficult to identify if we compare them to loanwords. The latter are either direct borrowings from the donor language or have been adapted to conform to the orthographical or morphosyntactic structure of the recipient language but in any case their *foreignness* is evident. Loan translations or calques represent cases of lexical or phraseological interference which are definitely less conspicuous (Pergnier 1989: 89).

The long, lively and, at times, turbulent linguistic relation between English and French goes back to the Norman Conquest in 1066 and has been more often than not a subject of controversy, above all on the continental side of the English Channel. We shall not look into the enormous and significant influence of English syntax and phraseology on Canadian French and the extent and pervasiveness of multi-word loan translations and semantic borrowings in this language variety: this influence is mainly the product of languages in contact and of bilingualism and these matters fall outside the scope of the present study. We will focus on the French language of France and especially on these two types of Anglicism in journalistic discourse.²

² We concur with the idea that loan translations and semantic loans from English are Anglicisms at the same level as loanwords (Picone 1996: 3).

Former studies on the influence of English on French have dealt nearly exclusively with direct borrowings or renderings of English single words or compounds such as *vers blanc*, a calque from ‘blank verse’ (Mackenzie 1939: 44) or *presse jaune*, from ‘yellow press’ (Mackenzie 1939: 252). *L’homme de la rue* (< ‘the man in the street’) is one of the few instances of a full idiomatic phrase analysed as an *emprunt déguisé* (‘disguised loan’), having been used for the first time by a French politician back from a trip to England in 1911 (Mackenzie 1939: 259). This same string has also been classified as a case of a translation from English into French and into Italian even though “chronological evidence would be difficult to establish” (Ullmann 1947: 1175).

It is the *Dictionnaire des Expressions et Locutions* (DEL) by Alain Rey and Sophie Chantreau that supplies some information concerning the origin of French idiomatic expressions and the date on which phrases were first attested in French. Other French general dictionaries such as the *Le Petit Robert* (LPR) also label a certain number of the strings under investigation as calques from English. Some multi-word units were calqued from English during the 19th century but there were, nevertheless, not very many: the idiomatic compound noun ‘pea-souper’ or ‘pea-soup’ was rendered as *purée de pois* in French and was first attested in 1896, according to the DEL.

The 20th century brought with it a large swathe of multi-word units, among which *marché aux puces* (< ‘flea market’) and *jeter l’éponge* (< ‘throw in

the sponge’), the former attested at the very beginning of the last century and the latter first attested in 1918.

Both *purée de pois* and *marché aux puces* confirm the preponderance of idiomatic compound nouns as potential candidates for phraseological calquing. The same thing applies to *rideau de fer* (< ‘Iron Curtain’), first attested in French in 1946.

For the second half of the 20th century, the DEL supplies the following entry: *donner le feu vert* (< ‘give sb/sth the green light’), first attested somewhere between 1955 and 1960. The following examples (taken from Humbley 1974: 63) illustrate the important number and level of phraseological calques adopted in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s:

une épaule sur laquelle pleurer – *a shoulder to cry on*

de la bouche du cheval – *out of the horse’s mouth*

faire chavirer le bateau – *upset the boat*

un cadavre dans le placard – *a skeleton in the cupboard*

être dans les souliers de quelqu’un – *to be in somebody’s shoes*

les vilains de l’histoire, de la farce – *the villains of the piece*

le lait de la tendresse humaine – *the milk of human kindness*

nager ou couler ensemble – *sink or swim together*

We will be dealing further down with a synchronic state-of-the-art investigation of the presence of phraseological calques in French journalistic

discourse focused on the incidence of this type of multi-word loan translations mainly in the first decade of the 21st century.

2. Research methodology, corpora and dictionaries

We have searched in the nomenclature of the DEL for French idioms showing the same or nearly the same syntactic and lexical structure as their English counterparts. Then these items have been classified according to whether they are labelled or not as Anglicisms.

We have manually recorded a certain number of potential idiomatic calques from the French daily press, television channels and radio stations. Phrases such as *plafond de verre* (< ‘glass ceiling’) can be read and heard nearly systematically every time the topic of women’s access to top positions in the public sector or in private companies arises. Curiously enough, no occurrences of the idiomatic use of the phrase have been found in *Frantext*, which sharply contrasts with a total of 588 results in the online newspaper archives of the *Le Monde* corresponding to articles—dealing mainly with equality between the sexes—from 1987 to date (21 June 2011).

Frantext is the most important French reference corpus with a total of 4,036 texts and 243,930,462 words. It is mostly made up of literary texts going from 1180 to 2009. In spite of its spanning almost a millennium, contemporary texts are especially well represented in the corpus—about

one-fourth of the texts are from 1950 onwards. It should be pointed out that *Frantext* includes a large variety of texts including literary works, newspaper articles, cookbooks, thrillers, scientific literature, etc.

When investigating the presence of multi-word units in the press one needs online newspaper archives which can allow searches for exact word combinations. The *Le Nouvel Observateur* is France's most widely-read weekly news magazine treating mainly political, economic and cultural matters. Its search engine can yield results for exact phrases and the articles in which these phrases are inserted can be accessed freely. The results provided in this study correspond to the presence of these phrases in the *Le Nouvel Observateur* for a period of roughly ten years, from the year 2000 to date. Examples have also been extracted from daily newspapers such as the *Libération* and the *Le Monde* in order to account for wider representativeness in French journalistic discourse.

We have used the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) to verify the date when the English phrase was first attested and the 2000 and 2009 editions of the *Le Petit Robert* (LPR00, LPR09) in order to corroborate the presence of loan translations or semantic loans and be able to account for the lexicographical evolution of the items under scrutiny.

3. Internationalisms or common loan translations from biblical, classical or literary sources

According to Bologne, a saying such as *Loin des yeux, loin du cœur* (< ‘Out of sight, out of mind.’) has its origin in the work *De Imitatio Christi* by Thomas à Kempis published in 1441 (Bologne 1999: 299) and *Le temps c’est de l’argent* (< ‘Time is money.’) would go back to the ancient Greeks, in particular to the work of Theophrastus (Bologne 1999: 305). However, according to the DEL the latter is a calque from the American adage *Time is money*, attributed to Benjamin Franklin and appearing in the book *Advice to a Young Tradesman* published in 1748 (DEL: 750). It should be pointed out that Bologne cites the metaphorical source of the loan translation, the original Greek phrase—translated into English as ‘Time is a luxurious expense’—whose lexico-grammar does not correspond exactly to either the English or the French expression whereas the DEL strictly accounts for the actual word-by-word phraseological source.

The Bible, said to be the most influential book in the history of humankind, represents a major source of paremiological and phraseological loan translations in myriads of languages. The same applies to classical languages, such as Latin and Greek, which stand for the second source of inspiration. The English expression ‘to be in seventh heaven’ is a clear example of what has been termed an Europeanism or internationalism (Piirainen 2005: 45). The phrase is found in numerous languages such as German *im siebten Himmel sein*, French *être au septième ciel*, Spanish *estar en el séptimo cielo*, Portuguese *estar no sétimo céu*, Italian *essere al settimo*

cielo, etc. and its origins can be traced back to ancient sources such as the Apocrypha, the Koran and the Cabbalists (Pirainen, forthcoming). Other examples of internationalisms include phrases belonging to the great classics of world literature as is the case with *tilt at windmills*, a multi-word loan translation from the novel *Don Quixote* by the Spanish writer Cervantes. Pirainen also mentions *the tip of the iceberg* as an internationalism and classifies it in the group of 22 Widespread Idioms (WIs) coming under the subheading “Natural environment, plants, and animals”. This scholar gives plenty of examples in her book such as the already mentioned *the tip of the iceberg* or *to throw the baby out with the bath (water)*, both of which are sources of equivalent translations in French that are classified as Anglicisms in the DEL. *To be in the same boat*, also mentioned by Pirainen as an internationalism and attested in Cicero and others, is recorded as a stereotypical example of a phraseological calque rendered into Spanish from English with the phrase *estar en el mismo barco* (Lorenzo 1996: 633). This same example is also given as an Anglicism in the case of the German phrase *im selben Boot sitzen* (Görlach 2003: 62).

Only if we take into consideration the fact that even though much of the common phraseology shared by many European and non-European languages may have its roots in the distant past, it is certain that the contrastive use of synchronic and diachronic corpora can clearly show the emergence of new items or a break in their semantic continuity (Gardiner 1983: 514). At any rate, a fundamental distinction should be made between

the metaphorical source and the phraseological source of a given expression. The metaphorical source conjures up the original image rendered in whatever lexico-grammatical form whereas the phraseological source constitutes the exact or quasi-exact rendering of the phrase as found in the donor language.

4. Typologies of multi-word loan translations and semantic borrowings in French

Several attempts have been made to classify loan translations and semantic borrowings in French. We will refer here to the taxonomies concerning exclusively multi-word loan translations and semantic borrowings or *calques phraséologiques* (Deroy 1956: 217; Humbley 1974: 63; Meney 1994: 938).

Humbley considers loan translations and semantic borrowings as two entirely different entities since a semantic borrowing “ne produit pas de lexie différente” (Humbley 1974: 62).³ He subdivides loan translations into three distinct groups putting together compounds and idioms. The first one includes compounds such as *air conditionné* (< ‘air conditioned’) which do not conform to the standard rules of word-formation in French. To the second group belong idiosyncratic collocations in English which have been

³ According to Humbley a semantic borrowing “does not produce a new lexical item”.

rendered verbatim into French such as *grève sauvage* (< ‘wild strike’) and finally a third group where he includes the so-called *emprunts phraséologiques* (‘phraseological borrowings’) such as *un cadavre dans le placard* (< ‘a skeleton in the cupboard’) (Humbley 1974: 63).

But the most comprehensive taxonomy of Anglicisms in French is the one developed by Meney. This scholar restricts it to Canadian French and divides loan translations into *calques lexicaux* (‘lexical loan translations’), *calques locutionnels* (‘phrasal loan translations’), *calques idiomatiques ou phraséologiques* (‘idiomatic or phraseological loan translations’) and *calques au niveau de la phrase* (‘sentence-like loan translations’) (Meney 1994: 936-938). Except for the first type, we are here concerned by the other three which will be conflated under the heading ‘multi-word loan translations’.

The first typology below includes the grammatical types found in multi-word loan translations and semantic borrowings. They comprise all different types of combinations. Contrary to general phraseology in which predicates—a verb and its arguments—are the commonest type followed by adverbial phrases (Moon 1998: 88), noun groups—idiomatic lexical compounds and noun phrases—tend to be here the commonest type, corroborating the idea that “nouns are most easily borrowed” (Haugen 1950: 224):

1. Complex prepositions: *en terme(s) de*.⁴
2. Prepositional phrases: *en temps réel, au-dessous de la ceinture*.
3. Idiomatic lexical compounds: *patate chaude, cercle vertueux, zone grise*.
4. Noun phrases: *plafond de verre, effet domino, des papillons dans le ventre, un éléphant dans la chambre, la conquête des cœurs et des esprits*.
5. Collocations: *faire du sens, faire la différence*.
6. Collocational frameworks: *être en charge de*.⁵
7. Predicate idioms: *croiser les doigts, jeter l'éponge, jeter le bébé avec l'eau du bain*.
8. Sayings and proverbs: *Le temps c'est de l'argent*.
9. Allusions and quotations: *Le lait de la tendresse humaine*.

Être en charge de is analysed as an example of loan translation from English and is representative of the type of interference whose use is increasing exponentially in French and substituting extremely similar existing structures such as *avoir la charge de* or *être chargé de* (Pergnier 1989: 150). The loan translation of English collocations and collocational frameworks is clearly fostered by the resemblance of cognate forms and syntactic structures.

A second typology, dealing with the semantic, pragmatic and discursive proprieties, breaks down as follows:

⁴ *En termes de* has already been classified as a loan translation from English (Meney 1994: 937).

⁵ See Renouf A. & Sinclair J. M., "Collocational Frameworks in English".

1. The idiomatic reading does not exist in the recipient language: *plafond de verre*.
2. Synonymous multi-word units exist in the recipient language and are still in good health: *effet domino*.⁶
3. The semantic extension to a certain number of pragmatic contexts is calqued resulting in idiomatic polysemy in the recipient language: *trou noir*.
4. Calquing of discursive functions: *en terme(s) de*.⁷
5. An uncommon collocation is literally rendered into the recipient language substituting an analogous collocation, *avoir du sens*, or a different structure altogether such as *être logique: faire du sens*.

The case of *trou noir* is representative of the phenomenon of calquing of a semantic extension. The compound noun is either used as a specialised term in astronomy meaning “a region in space where gravity is so strong that nothing, not even light, can escape” or figuratively in the phrase *C’est le trou noir* to indicate a situation of deep unhappiness or depression. The 2009 edition of the LPR only registers these two senses. The sense that the

⁶ *Onde de choc* and *réaction en chaîne* have 27 and 55 occurrences respectively in *Frantext*.

⁷ The *Trésor de la Langue Française informatisé* (TLFi) registers only one sense of the complex preposition, i.e. “in the terminology or in the language of a certain art or profession”. All the senses and pragmatic uses that we know today are not attested in this updated state-of-the-art dictionary. For the use of *in terms of* as a focaliser and a topicaliser, see Martí Solano (forthcoming).

compound has acquired in English as “an imaginary place in which things are lost” has been calqued in French as illustrated in the following example:

- (3) Sur un million de personnes qui devraient arriver en fin de droits à une indemnisation chômage en 2010, « *une partie bénéficie de la solidarité nationale (RSA, ASS, autres aides) et d'autres [...] sont un peu dans un trou noir de notre système de solidarité nationale* », a observé Laurent Wauquiez. (*Libération*, 25 February 2010)

5. Presence and impact of multi-word loan translations and semantic borrowings in French journalistic discourse and dictionaries

We have selected a number of items labelled as Anglicisms in the DEL and we have checked their presence in the printed press in order to account for pervasiveness and institutionalisation. We have manually selected a number of French multi-word units—for the most part predicate idioms and figurative lexical compounds—currently used in the printed press, the radio or television. The reason for working with the French weekly *Le Nouvel Observateur* lies in the fact that it is one of the very few French news publications that allow exact multi-word searches and free access to the articles. Frequencies are obviously to be considered as relative if they were

to be benchmarked against the results in much bigger archives. However, the figures supplied in tables 1 and 2 are definitely pivotal and significant for the degree of integration and institutionalisation of each of the units under analysis. The results correspond to the number of articles where the exact phrase is used between 2000 and 2010.

Multi-word units, if compared to single-word units, are usually not easy to classify as calques. We have only found two instances of phraseological calques labelled as Anglicisms by the LPR and the DEL. These are *adopter un profil bas* (< ‘keep a low profile’) and *faire la différence* (< ‘make the difference’).⁸ The former does not exactly conform to the original phrase in the donor language in the sense that the order of adjective + noun in English has been reversed in French and that the French verbal constituent is not the exact equivalent of ‘keep’ although some verb variants such as *maintenir* or *garder* (both meaning ‘keep’) show the influence of the English verb. But the phrase is much more frequently found under the form *faire profil bas* which lexico-grammatically further distances itself from its English counterpart and whose only occurrence in *Frantext* goes back to 2008. As to the collocation *faire la différence*, the calque is exact and it works satisfactorily in the written press although some speakers can still wrinkle their nose in disapproval when heard in conversation. This calque is very well established and is the second most widespread item on the frequency

⁸ *Adopter un profil bas* is mentioned as a phraseological neologism in Merle *et al.* 1987. It is classified as a loan translation applying “to units above word rank” by Görlach (2003: 62).

list with a total of 728 hits. It is referred to as a calque from English in the LPR09.

It is interesting to notice the cases of *en terme(s) de* and *adopter un profil bas*, progressively mounting since the year 2000 and exploding in the last three or four years. This steady and unbroken evolution goes hand in hand with the extremely high frequency of use of both phrases. Equally noteworthy are the cases of strings such as *plafond de verre*, *effet domino*, *cercle vertueux*, *jeter le bébé avec l'eau du bain* et *jeter l'éponge*, among others, whose occurrences are found nearly exclusively from 2007 to date. These data clearly demonstrate how these phraseological calques are gaining ground in French and prove their significance as a recent phenomenon.

Table 1. Multi-word loan translations and semantic borrowings classified as Anglicisms in the DEL and number of occurrences in the *Le Nouvel Observateur* (LNO) and the *Frantext* corpus

MWUs	LNO	Frantext
<i>le feu vert</i>	1497	33

<i>faire la différence</i> ⁹	728	1
<i>jeter l'éponge</i>	501	7
<i>un profil bas</i>	301	7
<i>la cerise sur le gâteau</i>	216	7
<i>croiser les doigts</i>	75	6
<i>ce n'est pas ma tasse de thé</i>	66	3
<i>la politique de/faire l'autruche</i>	64	6
<i>l'homme de la rue</i>	63	58
<i>la partie visible de l'iceberg</i>	43	2
<i>jeter le bébé avec l'eau du bain</i>	42	1
<i>la carotte et le bâton</i>	29	4

Some loan translations have been benchmarked against other Romance languages, especially Spanish, in which the phrase *el palo y la zanahoria* (lit. ‘the stick and the carrot’) has been given as an example of a phraseological calque from English (Lorenzo 1996: 486). All the occurrences in the *Frantext* corpus of *croiser les doigts* are attested between 1887 and 1975 and they make reference to the physical sense of the phrase, proving the importation of the figurative sense into French. The high

⁹ For predicate idioms we have used both the infinitive and the past participle for our searches as these two forms put together account for most of the tokens amid all the conjugated forms. It goes without saying that the total number of tokens of predicate idioms is therefore a little higher.

number of tokens of *l'homme de la rue* corresponds to the free syntactic combination in most cases: the first token found in *Frantext* of its idiomatic sense was used in a book by Paul Morand entitled *New York* in 1930.

We have carried out another frequency study concerning French expressions which are not attested either in French general dictionaries or in dictionaries of idioms but that crop up in the French press and other media:

Table 2. Multi-word loan translations and semantic borrowings not recorded in the DEL and number of occurrences in the *Le Nouvel Observateur* (LNO) and the *Frantext* corpus

MWUs	LNO	Frantext
<i>cercle vertueux</i>	149	1
<i>effet domino</i>	121	0
<i>patate chaude</i>	81	2
<i>plafond de verre</i>	49	0
<i>conquête des cœurs et des esprits</i>	7	1
<i>quinze minutes de gloire</i>	6	0
<i>éléphant blanc</i>	5	0
<i>sous le(s) feu(x) des projecteurs</i>	1	0
<i>avoir des papillons dans le ventre</i>	1	0

The number of occurrences in *Frantext* is comparatively lower in table 2 than in table 1, which reflects the coherence between frequency range in texts and lexicographical treatment. There are 37 examples of *éléphant blanc* in the *Frantext* corpus but none of these correspond to the figurative sense of the phrase as used in Canadian French. The two examples of *patate chaude* (< ‘hot potato’) are from 2001 and 2006 but only the latter “J’aurais voulu lui refiler tout de suite sa patate chaude” takes on the figurative sense.¹⁰ Only the 2009 edition of the LPR has a sub-entry for the figurative sense of this phrase which is classified as a calque from English. All things considered, the results in tables 1 and 2 are but tentative frequency scores that can definitely be improved by subsequent quantitative analysis in larger text databases.

5.1. *Degrees and strategies of integration*

It is widely accepted that journalists are regularly and systematically in contact with international news coming to them most of the time in English (Pergnier 1989: 131) and that the majority of the examples of loan translations and semantic borrowings come from the written press or other

¹⁰ The same calque from English has been rendered into Spanish with the phrase *patata caliente* (Lorenzo 1996: 599).

types of mass media, which makes journalists, TV conductors and radio presenters responsible for not only extending their use but also for legitimising it (Pergnier 1989: 155).

A common practice in journalism consists in inserting words, phrases, sentences and even whole paragraphs in articles between inverted commas. These quotations, when uttered by English-speaking people, are usually rendered in the recipient language respecting formulae, phraseology and other stylistic traits from the donor language as illustrated in the following example:

- (4) Le CIO a annoncé fin novembre qu'il allait examiner l'implication possible de l'un de ses membres au lendemain de la diffusion d'un documentaire diffusé par la BBC, concernant des affaires présumées de corruption au sein de la Fifa. « Aux fans de sports, je suis désolé et je regrette qu'ils soient déçus par la mauvaise gestion [...] mais en même temps, j'ai envie de leur dire qu'il ne faut pas jeter le bébé avec l'eau du bain », a-t-il ajouté. (*Le Nouvel Observateur*, 29 September 2010)

This practice represents the most straightforward instance of multi-word loan translations and semantic borrowings that find their way into the recipient language and get subsequently established and eventually

institutionalised. Other reasons that have been suggested for the introduction of calques in the press have to do with journalists being more proficient at English and with the fact of English being a lingua franca, actually spoken in different professional circles in Europe (Lenoble-Pinson 1991: 7).

Concerning their degree of integration, loan translations and semantic borrowings must be observed under the light of restricted or unrestricted cultural contexts (Chesley 2010: 236). High-frequency units tend to appear in unrestricted cultural contexts and are never or rarely between inverted commas. On the other hand, some of the low-frequency units are clearly recognisable because they appear either between inverted commas or in restricted cultural contexts—in pieces of news from or about English-speaking countries.

To compensate for the introduction of an idiomatic calque, some metalinguistic strategies can be put into action. Their degree of novelty is signalled by the use of inverted commas, by an explicit reference to its context of use or by the use of all sorts of explanations or other linguistic formulae.

- (5) L'arrivée sur le marché du travail d'un nombre croissant de femmes diplômées n'a pas suffi à briser le plafond de verre qui empêche leur ascension au sommet de la hiérarchie des entreprises. (*Le Monde*, 1 June 2010)

In (5) the defining relative clause which follows the underlined idiomatic expression is used as an explanation of its meaning for the potential French readers—the corresponding information for an English-speaking audience would probably not have been needed.

- (6) Symbole de cette campagne au-dessous de la ceinture : la tête de liste du Val-d'Oise, Ali Soumaré. « *On a voulu le briser, comme symbole de la jeunesse* », accuse Huchon. « *Nous, on est fiers de t'avoir avec nous* », lui lance Aubry. (*Libération*, 12 March 2010)

The expression in (6) collocates with the word *campagne* ('campaign') and represents a step further in the general process of adaptation and institutionalisation: the whole phrase, which could be rendered as a 'below-the-belt campaign' is a clear example of an attributive use of a multi-word unit. We have not found a figurative use of the phrase in the LPR09, which obviously only registers the unit in its literal sense.

- (7) Aujourd'hui, le temps des « éléphants blancs », ces projets pharaoniques synonymes de commandes juteuses pour les entreprises européennes, semble bien révolu. (*Libération*, 12 July 2006)

The idiomatic noun phrase *éléphants blancs* in (7) is both between inverted commas and expanded by a long explanation in the form of an apposition. This example illustrates the lowest degree of the continuum or cline of adaptation and institutionalisation of phraseological calques.

The use of a general corpus such as *Frantext* can shed light on the presence of certain word combinations or phrases and the fact of having extended or taken on a new meaning. *Zone grise* (< 'grey area') has only three occurrences in this corpus, all of them from the same work *La fin des asiles* by Hervé Bazin from 1959. The combination is used in the field of psychiatry and mental health and is not related at all to the figurative sense of the English idiom meaning 'a subject or problem that people do not know how to deal with because there are no clear rules'. Moreover, the phrase is not attested in any of the French dictionaries consulted, even though the new sense can be found in the written press as illustrated in the following example:

- (8) « Il faut prendre de façon apaisée le traitement de la question tout en rappelant le cadre de la non-discrimination », a conseillé le Halde. Son président Eric Molinié a estimé la semaine dernière dans *La Croix* qu'« entre la vie privée et les services publics, il existe une zone grise, tout un secteur d'activités où l'on sert l'intérêt général ». (*Le Nouvel Observateur*, 8 February 11)

The case of *zone grise* in (8) is revealing of the fact that, due to the difficulty of pinpointing this phenomenon, the frequency of semantic borrowings in French has been clearly underestimated (Picone 1996: 101). We know that new meanings are not always the product of a semantic borrowing and that languages can and do actually develop the same new senses, semantic extensions or semantic shifts regardless of the influence that a given foreign language might eventually exert. However, we subscribe, for the cases we have considered so far, to the principles outlined in the following quotation:

The other general type of semantic analogy, namely that due to extraneous influence, has to do with the borrowing of meanings. [...] And yet the possibility of loan-meanings cannot be overlooked in any thorough semantic investigation. Furthermore, while a loan-word is traceable by its form, which usually is easily identified with the parent stem, the loan-meaning has no distinct earmarks except in the few cases where a singularly idiomatic turn stamps it as exotic. [...] But even where proof is lacking, it is more reasonable, from what we know of the readiness of the mind to take up new ideas, to suppose that where we have an idea carried by a number of unrelated words in many dialects, there has been semantic transference rather than independent origin. (Kroesch 1926: 43-44)

5.2. *Lexicographical treatment*

We have used both the 2000 and 2009 editions of the LPR in order to observe entries and sub-entries and their evolution in a span of time roughly corresponding to our frequency research in the online archives of the *Le Nouvel Observateur*. Long-established phraseological calques such as *avoir un cadavre/squelette dans le placard*, *l'homme de la rue*, *se refiler la patate chaude* or *adopter un profil bas* are recorded by both general dictionaries as well as by French dictionaries of idioms.

Some of the expressions we have investigated that are not recorded in the DEL or in the LPR00 have been recorded in the LPR09, which is indicative of their degree of integration into the language. *Cercle vertueux* (< 'virtuous circle', in its turn an institutionalised variation on the canonical form 'vicious circle', not yet recorded in English dictionaries of idioms), *plafond de verre* and *effet domino* clearly exemplify this lexicographical practice despite the fact that these strings have been in use for several decades as illustrated by the following example:

L'expression « cercle vertueux » est à la mode. Les politiques, dans leurs discours, les journalistes, dans leurs articles, l'utilisent alors qu'ils n'y a guère ils l'ignoraient. Peut-être son emploi manifeste-t-il

l'espoir de voir notre pays, enfin, sortir de la crise, grâce, à partir des premiers... (*Le Monde*, 30 December 1989)

A special case among this group is *éléphant blanc* which is recorded in the LPR09 with the geographic label *region Canada*.

Finally, other expressions are not recorded at all with their idiomatic sense in any of the dictionaries consulted such as *trou noir* or *zone grise*, bearing out the fact that semantic borrowings are harder and take longer to be naturalised and therefore recorded in lexicographical works, serving as a way of measuring integration into French.

We consider that the inclusion of the idiomatic loan translation or the semantic borrowing in a French general dictionary accounts for their level of institutionalisation and acknowledgment among language users.

Conclusions

Multi-word loan translations and semantic borrowings in French are not only a product of languages in contact or bilingualism. Mass media in general and the French press in particular abound with these multi-word units which tend to pass unnoticed as Anglicisms for the general reader. Idiomatic noun phrases, followed closely by predicate idioms, are definitely the type most usually found although all different types of lexical and

syntactic combinations are more or less pervasive. Even though the French language has been influenced by English for centuries, this phenomenon is principally a result of the new globalised era of communication and information. Some strings have already been used as a fixed, more or less lexicalised combination, as for instance *zone grise*, but it is the new sense that the pre-existing phrase develops in certain contexts that is considered innovative and unprecedented. Multi-word loan translations represent not only a phraseological borrowing but also a cultural one as a new image or metaphor is imported into the recipient language. Two different stages of integration (high and low level) should be considered depending on frequency rates, typographical markers and lexicographical treatment. Obviously, a much bigger corpus would be needed to obtain more fine-grained results even though clear tendencies and patterns can be observed, above all in the use of newly imported idiomatic noun phrases.

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