Pragmatic Functions of English Borrowings in Chinese

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Abstract

Although the use of English borrowings in Chinese is not uncommon, there are still few studies having explored the pragmatic dimension of these borrowings. Besides, few of the previous studies adopt an onomasiological approach to study borrowings. Thus, this study aims to investigate the pragmatic functions of English borrowings by comparing English borrowings with their native equivalents in line with the onomasiological approach. To this end, the study collects data from Weibo and divides the English borrowings occurring in the hot topics on Weibo into two types based on the existence of native equivalents, namely, catachrestic borrowings and non-catachrestic borrowings. It is revealed in the study that catachrestic borrowings provide a stereotypical interpretation of a concept that has not been lexicalized in Chinese and primarily serve the function of filling lexical gaps while non-catachrestic borrowings can create special pragmatic effects as marked choices in contrast to their native equivalents. While drawing the distinction between catachrestic and non-catachrestic borrowings helps shed light on their different functions, this study argues that the distinction is dynamic and context-dependent as the pragmatic functions of borrowings are conditioned by contexts and susceptible to change. By analyzing borrowings from the pragmatic dimension, this study not only demonstrates the importance of pragmatic functions in people's adoption of borrowings but also confirms the applicability and effectiveness of an onomasiological approach to borrowing.

Keywords: catachrestic borrowings, English borrowings, non-catachrestic borrowings, onomasiological approach, pragmatic functions

1. Introduction

1.1 Borrowing and Codeswitching

As a global language, English is in contact with Chinese, which leads to the incorporation of English-origin items into Chinese through the process of borrowing. These items, known as borrowings, loans, or transfers, may include morphs, words, phrases, and other formulaic expressions as well as the patterns of word formation or construction (Matras, 2020, p. 158). Apart from borrowing, another contact-induced phenomenon, codeswitching, which involves alternations between two languages used within a conversation (Matras, 2020, p. 107), can also generate insertions of foreign items, rendering the status of a foreign item unclear, as it can either be a borrowing or a codeswitch, especially among bilingual speakers. Although some linguists argue that a clear distinction can be drawn between borrowing and codeswitching based on the criterion that borrowings are structurally integrated into the language that replicates foreign items (i.e., recipient language or RL) as opposed to codeswitches (e.g., MacSwan, 2016; Poplack, 2018), it has been established that there is a wide range of variance in their levels of integration, indicating that borrowing and codeswitching should be better viewed as two phenomena on a continuum without a clear boundary (e.g., Winford, 2010; Matras, 2020). Thus, this study holds the view that foreign items can diachronically move from the codeswitching end to the borrowing end on the continuum with their diffusion and conventionalization in the RL speech community, which is in line with a usage-based approach (Backus, 2014). This view raises a significant question as to what factors facilitate the acceptance and diffusion of foreign elements in the RL speech community and convert them from some speakers' idiosyncratic use (i.e., codeswitching) to widely used borrowings, drawing attention to the pragmatic functions of these linguistic forms.

1.2 A Pragmatic Distinction Between Borrowings

1.2.1 Cultural Borrowings (Necessary Borrowings) versus Core Borrowings (Luxury Borrowings)

A long-standing distinction divides borrowings into two types based on the availability of native equivalents in the RL at the time of borrowing, namely, cultural borrowings and core borrowings. Cultural borrowings are introduced into the RL when there is no native equivalent available to designate new concepts or objects, whereas core borrowings have existing semantic equivalents in the RL (Myers-Scotton, 2006, pp. 212–215). Cultural borrowings and core borrowings are also referred to as necessary borrowings and luxury borrowings respectively by some linguists (Onysko & Winter-Froemel, 2011, p. 1551). Grounded in the distinction drawn by Myers-Scotton, Hock and Joseph (1996, p. 258), Haspelmath (2009, pp. 46–49), and Matras (2020, pp. 161–163) differentiate the gap-filling function of cultural borrowings from the function of signifying prestige of core borrowings. However, this appears to be oversimplified because cultural borrowings may carry pragmatic functions as well and core borrowings are not necessarily restricted to the prestige function (Winter-Froemel, 2017; Zenner et al., 2019). Therefore, although drawing the distinction seems to be a viable approach to investigating the functions of borrowings by taking the RL equivalents into account, the limitations mentioned above imply that a closer look into the comparison between borrowings and their native equivalents is needed to specify why a foreign item rather than its native equivalent(s) is selected in a certain context.

1.2.2 Catachrestic Borrowings versus Non-Catachrestic Borrowings

The approach of considering both borrowings and RL equivalents is rephrased by Zenner and Kristiansen (2014, p. 1) as an "onomasiological, concept-based approach to borrowing". Under the onomasiological approach, Onysko and Winter-Froemel (2011) draw a distinction between catachrestic borrowings and non-catachrestic borrowings, which resembles the traditional distinction between cultural borrowings and core borrowings or necessary borrowings and luxury borrowings. New terminologies are employed because the labels of necessary borrowings and luxury borrowings are prescriptive and judgmental. To elaborate, borrowings without semantic equivalents are not indeed necessary considering that the RL has sufficient linguistic resources to coin terms for new concepts and borrowings coexisting with native equivalents are not just luxury since they often differ from their native alternatives pragmatically (Onysko & Winter-Foremel, 2011, p. 1552). Nor are the labels of cultural borrowings and core borrowings adequate. As Haspelmath (2009, p. 48) points out, borrowings with native equivalents (i.e., the so-called core borrowings) do not only involve core vocabularies.

The framework proposed by Onysko and Winter-Foremel marks the distinction between two types of borrowings both semantically and pragmatically. Semantically, drawing on the notion of catachresis in the rhetorical tradition, which refers to the use of a metaphor to express something absent from the vocabulary, they define catachrestic borrowings as the ones that have no semantic equivalents in the RL and non-catachrestic borrowings as the ones whose concepts have already been designated by native equivalents (Onysko & Winter-Foremel, 2011, pp. 1553–1554). Pragmatically, catachrestic borrowings provide a stereotypical interpretation of the designated concept, mainly bearing the pragmatic value of informativeness, as there is no other conventionalized way to express the designated concept in the RL; by contrast, non-catachrestic borrowings represent a marked way to express a concept in relation to native equivalents and, hence, can create special pragmatic effects (Onysko & Winter-Foremel, 2011, p. 1555). For example, the English word *computer* in German as a catachrestic borrowing is used as a default choice to designate a type of technological innovation with a labeling function (2011, p. 1560), whereas the English word *teenager* in German as a non-catachrestic borrowing performs the pragmatic function of associating the social class with modern youth culture (2011, p. 1563). Importantly, it is worth noting that the distinction between catachrestic and non-catachrestic borrowings is by no means a clear-cut dichotomy. For one thing, the dynamic use of language renders the classification of borrowings as well as their functions susceptible to change. For instance, a catachrestic borrowing may become non-catachrestic when a native equivalent is coined for language purism, while a non-catachrestic borrowing may witness a weakening in its pragmatic effects with its increasing frequency until it evolves into a default choice (Winter-Froemel & Onysko, 2012, p. 54). For another, the pragmatic distinction does not deprive one type of borrowing of the pragmatic values carried by the other. Catachrestic borrowings can also produce pragmatic effects such as indicating modernity and advancement, while non-catachrestic borrowings may bear informational value when serving as an unmarked choice in a specific context (Winter-Froemel, 2017, p. 40; Winter-Froemel & Onysko, 2012, p. 56).

In summary, the pragmatic functions of borrowings to some degree depend on the existence of their native equivalents, which highlights the significance of drawing a semantic and pragmatic distinction between borrowings, and the traditional terms of cultural (or necessary) borrowings and core (or luxury) borrowings

should be replaced by catachrestic and non-catachrestic borrowings because of the potentially misleading nature of the former. At the same time, a more comprehensive insight into the pragmatics of borrowings can be given by taking the dynamic characteristics of borrowings into account.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

Previous studies are mostly focused on the structural properties of English borrowings in Chinese, including their phonological and orthographic integration, semantic changes, and distribution in different parts of speech and lexical fields (e.g., Lu, 2006; Dang, 2017; Cook, 2018). However, there are few studies shedding light on the functional aspect of English borrowings. Although some studies conclude that inserting English borrowings into Chinese can create mysteriousness, exotism, modernity, and exquisiteness because of the prestige carried by English (e.g., Zhu, 2018; Shi, 2021) or construct the speakers' youth identity (e.g., Zhang, 2015; Qi & Mo, 2016), these studies do not take the native equivalents of English borrowings into account and thus cannot robustly explain why speakers select the English item over the native one that designates the same concept. Nonetheless, these studies demonstrate that the use of English borrowings in Chinese is not merely a lexical act for filling lexical gaps but also a deliberate linguistic choice made for producing pragmatic effects. Therefore, following the onomasiological approach and the framework of catachrestic and non-catachrestic borrowings, this study aims to discover the specific pragmatic functions of English borrowings and explore how the functions vary with different types of English borrowings and different contexts and whether they will change over time. By solving these questions, this study can contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon of borrowing in Chinese and how English, as an international language, adapts to the RL system pragmatically and complements the local language to meet the RL speakers' expressive needs.

2. Method

2.1 Data Collection

Given that English borrowings are largely confined to an informal register due to their nonstandard status and the government's resistance to random code-mixing (Zhang, 2015, p. 232), this study collects data from Weibo, one of China's largest social media with over 582 million monthly active users in the first quarter of 2022 (Wikipedia Contributors, 2019). Weibo is believed to impose fewer constraints on people's language use, encouraging the occurrence of foreign items. To be specific, this study settles on the hot topics introduced with hashtags on Weibo, which are created anonymously with an aim to invite posts and comments on a certain topic, such as #Hero 对阵 Tess# 'Hero vs. Tess'. Hot topics are chosen as data sources because they are publicly available with a considerable number of hits. Their popularity makes the English insertions occurring in hot topics more likely to be borrowings which have been widely diffused and accepted in this online community rather than idiosyncratic codeswitches. Otherwise, these topics can hardly invite many posts and gain popularity. The data of hot topics are accessible and can be downloaded from the website https://weibo.zhaoyizhe.com/. From this website, 4,000 hot topics with the most hits are collected from each month throughout the year 2021. Thus, there are 48,000 hot topics collected in total to constitute a dataset. All the empirical data in **Section 4** are sourced from this dataset.

After the collection of hot topics, the study takes the following steps to identify and select English borrowings for analysis. Firstly, all the hot topics containing alphabetic words that are also used in native English are singled out. Alphabetic words are defined as the foreign items that retain their alphabetic writing without being orthographically adapted to Chinese. This study only includes alphabetic words because they are structurally recognizable as foreign items for Weibo users, and only under this circumstance can we say that their non-Chinese character plays a role in people's selection of them over their Chinese equivalents (Geeraerts & Grondelaers, 2000, p. 56). In this sense, all the words of measurement units are excluded since they are usually pronounced the same way as their Chinese equivalents. For example, *cm* (*centimeter*) is pronounced as /limi/, the same as its Chinese equivalent 厘米 *limi*. Thus, it is more likely that Chinese speakers perceive them as symbols for Chinese words rather than linguistic borrowings. Besides, considering that the etymology of alphabetic words tends to be opaque to Chinese speakers, the alphabetic words that do not really originate from English are also included, such as *versus*, which was initially a Latin word. Secondly, proper names are excluded because people cannot use them productively (Onysko, 2007, p. 106). The proper names that have developed a generic usage are included, such as *SCI* which not only refers to the Science Citation Index but also denotes the articles that can be retrieved from the index. Thirdly, the alphabetic words that only occur once in someone's reported speech or in the title of songs and TV programs or other names are excluded, since they may reflect individuals' idiosyncratic use, approaching the codeswitching end on the continuum. Fourthly, morphological borrowings, hybrids which are comprised of elements from two languages or from both language and numerals,

non-lexicalized phrases, and loan creations coined by Chinese speakers are all excluded because they usually differ from their existing equivalents not only pragmatically but also syntactically. At last, 119 types of English borrowings occurring in 1,040 hot topics are selected for analysis.

2.2 Data Analysis

Based on the onomasiological approach, the study firstly identifies the concept denoted by each borrowing and then determines the Chinese expressions that denote the same or similar concept, which are treated as potential Chinese equivalents. To make clear the meanings and the Chinese equivalents of the borrowings, apart from referring to the contexts where the borrowings occur, the study also consults numerous dictionaries, search engines, and encyclopedias, including *Modern Chinese Dictionary* (the 7th edition), *Oxford Advanced Learner's English-Chinese Dictionary*, *The Language Situation in China*, Wikipedia, Baidu Baike, etc. Concerning polysemous borrowings, consideration is given only to the semantic meanings expressed in the contexts where they occur. The potential equivalents are also checked for their actual usage in the Weibo subcorpus of the BCC Corpus (http://bcc.blcu.edu.cn/), in the corpus of Chinese Web 2017 on Sketch Engine (https://app.sketchengine.eu/), and on the platform of Weibo (https://weibo.com). The equivalents that are used rarely or always together with the English borrowings as translations are excluded. This is particularly the case with the equivalents introduced for language purism with the emergence of new concepts initially designated by foreign words. Despite being semantically equivalent, they are not picked up by Chinese speakers or conventionalized in their mental lexicon, and thus they do not function as equivalents from a usage-based perspective, at least in the Weibo community.

After finding out the potential semantic equivalents, the study follows Onysko and Winter-Froemel's framework (2011) and classifies all the borrowings as catachrestic or non-catachrestic based on the existence of native equivalents at the time of research rather than at the time of borrowing. The borrowings that fit the following criteria are viewed as catachrestic: 1) they do not have a lexicalized semantic equivalent, which means that they can only be expressed through descriptive phrases or sentences in Chinese; 2) their native semantic equivalents are not in use, as mentioned above; 3) they form a taxonomic relation with the gathered semantic equivalents, being a hypernym or a hyponym of the equivalents, to be more precise, the semantic near-equivalents. The exception to the first criterion is the borrowings whose native equivalents, despite taking the form of phrases, have been standardized as literal translations of the borrowings, such as 首次公开募股 *shoucigongkaimugu* 'IPO', as in (1). This is determined by consulting multiple Chinese dictionaries and the Standardized Chinese Translations of Foreign Words recommended by the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (accessible from http://www.moe.gov.cn/s78/A18/A18_ztzl/ztzl_wyfygf/). The last criterion corresponds to the first one in that descriptive expressions are needed to express the exact meaning of the borrowing if the borrowing is a hypernym or hyponym of its lexicalized equivalent. A lexicalized item is defined as a fixed form whose meaning cannot be completely derived or predicted from its components, as opposed to phrases (Brinton & Traugott, 2005, p. 96), and meaning here specifically refers to "the semantic characteristics of a lexical item in isolation" (Backus, 2001, p. 128). All the other borrowings that do not meet the criteria are classified as non-catachrestic.

(1)   首次公开募股

      shouci-gongkai-mugu

      initial-public-offering

      'Initial Public Offerings (IPO)'

Besides the comparison of meaning between English borrowings and their native equivalents, the contexts in which they occur are also compared to figure out their special pragmatic functions.

3. Results

Based on the criteria stated in **Section 2.2**, it is found that among the 121 English borrowings 27% are catachrestic and 73% are non-catachrestic, as displayed by Table 1 (Note 1). See **Appendix A** for a full list of the borrowings. Among the non-catachrestic borrowings, 41% coexist with their literal translations which are introduced and promoted by the government for language purism, as in the case of *IPO*. In other words, nearly half of the non-catachrestic borrowings were initially catachrestic at the time of borrowing, but later they became non-catachrestic with native equivalents introduced subsequently. This indicates that the so-called "necessary loans" are not necessary, as a language system has sufficient material to coin new words for designating new concepts. Thus, it is the pragmatic functions that play a more important role in the use of foreign items.

Table 1. The number and proportion of catachrestic and non-catachrestic borrowings

	Number of word types	Proportion
Catachrestic borrowings	33	27%
Non-catachrestic borrowings	88	73%
Total	121	100%

4. Discussion

This section discusses the functions of catachrestic and non-catachrestic borrowings and illuminates the dynamic nature of pragmatic functions owing to the influence of diachronic development and changing contexts. Regarding catachrestic borrowings, it is not surprising that many borrowings fall into the fields rich in new concepts and objects, including the fields of technology, economy, and entertainment. What draws attention is the catachrestic borrowings in the general field which is composed of basic vocabularies that can be used in more than one field, such as *nice*, *get*, *cue*. Words in this field are believed to be shared in nearly all cultures (Tadmor, 2009, p. 65). Thus, attention is paid particularly to the borrowings with a catachrestic interpretation in the general field to explain how these basic words lack a semantic equivalent.

4.1 Catachrestic Borrowings in the General Field

Catachrestic borrowings lack a lexicalized Chinese equivalent that expresses the same semantic meaning. Instead, if there exist lexicalized Chinese equivalents, the Chinese counterparts tend to be the hypernyms of the borrowings, serving as semantic near-equivalents rather than full equivalents. In this case, the only means to express the exact meaning in Chinese is to employ non-lexicalized multi-word units. For example, the near equivalent of *wink* is 眨眼 *zhayan* which refers to both the action of closing and opening two eyes (designated by *blink*) and the action of closing and opening one eye (designated by *wink*). When people need to refer specifically to the action of winking, they have to give a descriptive expression, as in (2). Similarly, *pose* assumes a more specific meaning than its lexicalized Chinese near equivalent 姿势 *zishi*. The former refers to a particular position for photographing, while the latter is a hypernym denoting all kinds of positions in which someone is sitting, standing, or lying. A valid description of the meaning of *pose* can be given by a noun phrase, as in (3). Another example with semantic specificity is *boss*, which stands for a powerful villain in a story (Note 2). By contrast, the Chinese near-equivalent 反派 *fanpai* 'villain' does not indicate the strong power of the villain and thus is not as semantically specific as *boss*. To deliver the specific meaning, a noun phrase is needed given the unavailability of a word, as in (4).

(2) 眨一只眼

    zha   *yi*   *zhi*   *yan*

    close.open   one   CLF   eye

    'wink' (lit. 'close and open one eye')

(3) 拍照姿势

    pai   *zhao*   *zishi*

    take   photo   position

    'pose' (lit. 'a position for taking photos')

(4) 强大的反派

    qiangda   *de*   *fanpai*

    powerful   NOM   villain

    'a powerful villain'

Catachrestic borrowings may not necessarily form taxonomic relations with their lexicalized Chinese near-equivalents. To illustrate, *CP* (short for *couple* or *coupling*) refers to two people with noticeable intimate interactions, which tend to be a subjective perception of the speaker. As in (5a), *CP* is collocated with 感 *gan* 'sense' to suggest that the two people's relationship features the speaker's subjectivity. When it comes to two people who are married or in a romantic relationship, *CP* has several near-equivalents in Chinese, such as 夫妇 *fufu*, 夫妻 *fuqi*, and 情侣 *qinglǔ*. However, they denote an objective fact instead of a subjective perception, working in a complementary fashion with *CP*. Thus, in (5b), 夫妻 *fuqi* 'couple' cannot be replaced by *CP* since the Chinese word refers to a social relationship objectively. Besides, the usage of *CP* has been extended to

describe two people who are not married or in a romantic relationship. As in (5c), *CP* applies to two people who are grandfather and grandson, and *CP* here also highlights one's subjective perception in contrast to the near-equivalent 组合 *zuhe* 'group' which sounds more objective.

(5)　a. 张瀚孟子义 **CP** 感

　　　Zhang Han Meng Ziyi　　**CP**-*gan*

　　　Zhang Han Meng Ziyi　　CP-sense

　　'the sense that Zhang Han and Meng Ziyi looked like a good match' (lit. 'the sense of being a couple developed between Zhang Han and Meng Ziyi')

　　b. 夫妻的家就是婆婆的家吗？

　　　fuqi　*de*　*jia*　*jiushi*　*popo*　　　*de*　　*jia*　*ma?*

　　　couple　GEN　home　COP　mother.in.law　GEN　　home　Q?

　　'Is a couple's home the mother-in-law's home?'

　　c. 倪大红白敬亭爷孙 **CP**

　　　Ni Dahong Bai Jingting　*ye-sun*　　　　　　**CP**

　　　Ni Dahong Bai Jingting　grandfather-grandson　CP

　　'the grandfather-and-grandson group of Ni Dahong and Bai Jingting.'

4.2 Functions of Catachrestic Borrowings

Whether the English borrowings are taxonomically subordinated or complementary to their Chinese near-equivalents, they are used to fill lexical gaps as they cannot be replaced with any Chinese words but be paraphrased in descriptive expressions for an exact denotation. In the view of Onysko and Winter-Froemel (2011), these borrowings mainly carry the pragmatic value of informativeness by providing a stereotypical interpretation of a specific referent. This conforms to Backus' specificity hypothesis which states that "embedded elements in a codeswitching have a high degree of semantic specificity" (2001, p. 128). Backus (2001, p. 129) suggests that the hypothesis also applies to borrowings as code-switches can be viewed as earlier-stage borrowings. According to him, the semantic specificity of borrowings in relation to their RL equivalents could lead to their adoption at the time of borrowing as they can trigger stronger lexical needs than the words that are equivalent to and replaceable with existing native words. Furthermore, the semantic specificity also promotes their usage and conventionalization in the RL.

In addition to the gap-filling function, the use of catachrestic borrowings is also facilitated by their disambiguating function and brevity. For one thing, a more specific reference makes catachrestic borrowings less likely to cause ambiguity. For example, as in (6), using the Chinese word 姿势 *zishi* 'position' in the hot topic, the hypernym of *pose*, renders it unclear whether the position is a pose or walking posture. For another, as catachrestic borrowings are usually shorter than their Chinese descriptive expressions, their usage can lead to the economy of expression and higher communication efficiency as they allow speakers to convey the same amount of message in a more concise way.

(6)　五一度假姿势大赏

　　　wu-yi　*dujia*　***zishi***　*dashang*

　　　May-1st　holiday　position　collection

　　'a collection of positions during the holiday of May 1st (Labor Day)'

4.3 Functions of Non-Catachrestic Borrowings

According to Onysko and Winter-Froemel (2011), non-catachrestic borrowings can produce additional pragmatic effects as marked forms in contrast to their native equivalents. Based on this hypothesis, the following section discusses four distinctive pragmatic functions of non-catachrestic English borrowings in Chinese.

4.3.1 Creating Entertaining Effects

English insertions are largely confined to an informal register that embodies relaxation and playfulness due to their non-standard status. By contrast, formal settings feature the use of standard Chinese and the avoidance of code-mixing to signify seriousness (Bolton et al., 2020, p. 508). This way of language use endows English borrowings with entertaining effects and generally restricts them to light-hearted contexts. To illustrate, the English borrowing *cue*, which has undergone semantic shift and now takes on the meaning of 'mention', is

distributed in light-hearted contexts to create entertaining effects. For example, in (7a), the hot topic reports a scene in which Shen Teng, an entertainer, frequently mentions another entertainer Lu Han who is not present to produce amusement in an entertainment variety show. In line with the amusing atmosphere in the variety show, *cue*, instead of its native equivalent, is used to indicate the entertaining feature of the context. By contrast, the contexts that convey serious message favor the native equivalent 提 *ti* 'mention'. In (7b), the hot topic was created when the clothing company HM did not mention Xinjiang to make a sincere apology in its statement after it smeared Xinjiang, which triggered the Chinese people's indignation. Thus, this topic repels playfulness, calling for the use of the native equivalent as it sounds more serious than the English borrowing.

(7) a. 沈腾疯狂 **cue** 鹿晗

    *Shen Teng   fengkuang   **cue**   Lu Han*

    Shen Teng   crazy   mention Lu Han

    'Shen Teng mentions Luhan frequently like crazy.'

    b. HM 最新申明全文没提新疆

    *HM   zui xin   shengming quan   wen mei   **ti**   Xinjiang*

    HM   most late statement entire   text NEG mention Xinjiang

    'HM's latest statement does not mention Xinjiang at all.'

4.3.2 Projecting a Youth Image

Aside from informality, the use of English borrowings is also associated with the youth. For one thing, the innovation of English borrowings is usually led by youngsters, since the older generation is more conservative in their language use and reluctant to employ linguistic innovations that tend to be considered unconventional and non-standard (Tagliamonte, 2012, p. 47). For another, in China, English classes in formal education constitute the major situations for Chinese speakers to access and acquire English. Given that English teaching is not highly valued until around 2000 (Bolton et al., 2020, p. 508), the Chinese-English bilingual group is assumed to be dominated by the youth, and it is these people who act as agents for borrowing thanks to their bilingualism.

The association with the youth group facilitates the use of English borrowings in the contexts that depict the typical features of the youth. For instance, in (8a), *boy* is used to refer to someone's great-grandfather who is a lover of 手账 *shouzhang* 'notebook'. Specifically, 手账 designates a Japanese-style notebook, which is favored by Chinese young people as a modern and trendy item as opposed to the traditional counterpart designated by 笔记本 *bijiben* 'notebook'. Besides, the word itself is also a Japanese borrowing. Thus, the great-grandfather's fondness of 手账 reflects his pursuit of modernity and trendiness, a typical feature of young people, shaping his youth-like image. Under this circumstance, the English word *boy* corresponds to the old man's non-stereotypical image of his age and highlights his youth-like characteristic. By contrast, the native equivalent 男孩 *nanhai* 'boy' as the default choice provides a stereotypical interpretation of the social group. As in (8b), 男孩 is used to refer to a young child who represents an ordinary member of the social group. Meanwhile, the symbolic value of relaxation also applies to *boy*, as is reflected in the significantly higher degree of seriousness in the topic of (8b).

(8) a. 太爷爷也是个手账 **boy**

    *tai-yeye   ye shi ge shouzhang   **boy***

    great-grandfather also COP CLF notebook   boy

    'One's great-grandfather is also a notebook lover.'

    b. 英国 6 岁男孩遭父母殴打致死

    *yingguo 6-sui   **nanhai** zao   fumu   ouda zhi si*

    Britain 6-year.old boy   PASS   parent   beat cause death

    'A six-year-old British boy was beaten by his parents to death.'

4.3.3 Signifying Modernity and Internationalism

With the technological and economic advancements achieved in the English-speaking countries, especially the United States, many modern inventions are usually named in English, and these English labels are then borrowed into other cultures with the introduction of new inventions (Onysko & Winter-Froemel, 2011, p. 1561). Rather than being restricted to the technological and economic field, modern items are also included in the fields of fashion and entertainment which are closely related to the lifestyles in modern times (Winter-Froemel & Onysko,

2012, p. 52). The trend of globalization and the global status of English promote the worldwide circulation of English labels and further contribute to the association between English words and modernity. Thus, modernity can be signified by using English borrowings instead of their native equivalents. To illustrate, the English borrowing *solo*, which refers to a performance given by an individual alone, differs from its native equivalents in their distribution in different contexts. In (9a), *solo* applies to the performance of two singers who are famous for their modern pop songs; in (9b), the native equivalent, 独唱 *duchang* 'solo', only occurs once in the dataset and is used to denote the performance of a song with a traditional and ethnic flavor. Such a contrast can be attributed to the symbolic value of modernity indexed by English borrowings.

(9)   a. 杨丞琳容祖儿没有 **solo**

    *Yang Chenglin   Rong Zuer mei you **solo***

    Yang Chenglin   Rong Zuer NEG have solo

    'Yang Chenglin and Rong Zuer don't have a solo.'

   b. 王琪独唱

    *Wang qi   **duchang***

    Wang qi   solo

    'Wang Qi did a solo.'

Besides modernity, English is also linked to internationalism because of its global status and its extensive use in international settings (Crystal, 2003). The two values are closely correlated in that modern items tend to be global rather than local and the indexicality of modernity partly arises from the global status of English. Thereby, the use of English borrowings can also signify internationalism. For example, in the dataset, two hot topics mention the logo of the Paris Olympics, as in (10a), but neither of them selects the native equivalent 会徽 *huihui* 'logo'. The English borrowing *logo* is preferred because it indexes internationalism and better matches the international sporting event. Likewise, in (10b), although Xiaomi is a home-grown company, using *logo* rather than the native equivalent can not only add an international flavor and but also demonstrate the status of the company in the international market.

(10)   a. 巴黎奥运会 **LOGO** 寓意

    *bali aoyunhui **logo** yuyi*

    Paris Olympics logo implied.meaning

    'the implied meaning of the logo of the Paris Olympics.'

   b. 小米新 **logo**

    *Xiaomi xin **logo***

    Xiaomi new logo

    'the new logo of Xiaomi'

4.3.4 Bilingual Language Play: A Special Use of Borrowings (Note 3)

Language play is defined as a creative and deliberate manipulation of linguistic forms to create amusing and playful effects (Rivlina, 2015, p. 440). This definition highlights two defining features of language play: firstly, language play involves creative strategies, which is reflected by "the breaking, re-forming, and transforming of established patterns" (Maynard, 2007, p. 3), such as rhyming and punning (Rivlina, 2015, p. 443); secondly, the purpose of language play is to produce "fun, amusement, and entertainment" (Rivlina, 2020, p. 410). The linguistic forms manipulated for language play may be derived from one language only or from two languages. In the latter case, the creative and playful language practice is referred to as bilingual language play. Although borrowings are the resources available for bilingual language play, it is worth noting that the functions generated through language play are distinct from the function of creating entertaining effects illustrated in **Section 4.3.1**. To elaborate, the playfulness created by language play relies on the creative manipulation of linguistic forms rather than the comparison between borrowings and native equivalents. In addition, the functions of language play are less relevant to the extralinguistic values of English borrowings but more closely associated with their linguistic properties such as pronunciation, orthography, and syntactic patterns. Thus, bilingual language play represents a special use of borrowings.

The only type of bilingual language play in the dataset is bilingual punning which refers to the practice of using an element from one language to replace the element with the same pronunciation in another language to create

additional meanings (Rivlina, 2020, p. 412). To illustrate, in (11), the English word *blue* replaces 不露 *bulu* 'not come out' in the Chinese expression 深藏不露 *shencangbulu* 'hide something so deep that it does not come out'. By replacing 不露 *bulu* with *blue* based on their homophony, this sentence conveys two meanings. Firstly, it means that Dong Zijian kept his Blue River sheep milk formula (abbreviated into blue) hidden. Secondly, it suggests that Dong Zijian kept his own counsel and hid it so well that it did not come out. The creative manipulation that plays on homophony can generate fun and enjoyment for readers when they recognize the multiple meanings and make the environment jocular and light-hearted (Rivlina, 2020, p. 420).

(11)   董子健深藏 **blue**

     *Dong Zijian   shen-cang-**blue***

     Dong Zijian   deep-hide-blue

     'Dong Zijian hid Blue deep.'/ 'Dong Zijian kept his own counsel.'

4.4 The Dynamic Boundary Between Catachrestic and Non-Catachrestic Borrowings

Although a distinction can be drawn between catachrestic and non-catachrestic borrowings, the distinction is not equal to a clear-cut boundary considering the dynamic nature of language use. Instead, the boundary between the two types of borrowings is dynamic, fluid, and susceptible to change with diachronic development and changing contexts.

4.4.1 The Diachronic Transition Between Catachrestic and Non-Catachrestic Borrowings

The diachronic development can convert a catachrestic borrowing into a non-catachrestic one, and vice versa. For example, *rapper* was borrowed to denote musicians who perform rap music, a type of music of African American origin. It was initially a catachrestic borrowing, serving the function of filling a lexical gap. Later, its native equivalent 说唱歌手 *shuochanggeshou* 'rapper' was introduced for language purism or for the understanding of monolinguals, which then turns *rapper* into a non-catachrestic borrowing alongside the addition of special pragmatic effects. Given the association between English borrowings and entertainment, *rapper* is used in light-hearted contexts to create entertaining effects. As in (12a), *rapper* is employed to describe a character in a TV series. By contrast, its Chinese equivalent is used in serious topics to eliminate the entertaining effects attached to these entertainers, as in (12b). Conversely, a non-catachrestic borrowing may become catachrestic when it assumes a more specific meaning or undergoes semantic shift. For instance, *NG* (short for *negation* or *not good*) initially functioned as a non-catachrestic borrowing for euphemistic effects, since English borrowings are semantically opaque compared with native equivalents and can soften the offensiveness by avoiding the explicit conveyance of negative messages (Winter-Froemel, 2017, p. 31). However, with its usage confined to the film-making industry to denote a scene which is not good, it has become a technical term in this field, assuming a specific meaning of 'an occurrence of a scene that needs reshooting because of the performer's error', as in (13). This semantic shift turns *NG* into a catachrestic borrowing.

(12) a. 帝旭是斛珠夫人里的 **rapper** 吗？

       *Dixu shi   Huzhufuren   li   de   **rapper**   ma*

       Dixu COP   Pearl Eclipse in   NOM   rapper   Q

       'Is Dixu a rapper in Pearl Eclipse?'

    b. 说唱歌手向科比妻子道歉

       shuochang-geshou   *xiang*   *kebi*   *qizi*   *daoqian*

       rap-singer   to   Kobe   wife   apologize

       'A rapper apologized to Kobe's wife.'

(13) 易烊千玺拍电影以来 **NG** 最多的一次

     *Yi Yangqianxi pai   dianying yilai **NG**   zuiduo de   yi   ci*

     Yi Yangqianxi shoot film   since not.good most   NOM one   time

     'an occasion when Yi Yangqianxi has had the most unsatisfactory scenes (that require reshooting) since he started shooting films.'

4.4.2 A Non-Catachrestic Interpretation of Some Catachrestic Borrowings

Regarding semantics, the coinage of native equivalents for catachrestic borrowings or the semantic shift of non-catachrestic borrowings leads to the dynamic boundary between the two types of borrowings. At the same

time, pragmatically, there is no clear-cut boundary between catachrestic and non-catachrestic borrowings, either. Although catachrestic borrowings mainly serve the function of filling lexical gaps and carry the pragmatic value of informativeness, this does not indicate that they are deprived of special pragmatic effects. Concerning the catachrestic borrowings in the fields of technology, economy, and business, they can symbolize modernity, innovation, and advancement, paralleling non-catachrestic borrowings. The difference is that the symbolic values of catachrestic borrowings can be directly derived from the concepts designated by them, while non-catachrestic borrowings obtain the values indirectly from the use of language, such as the use of English to label modern inventions, as suggested by Winter-Froemel and Onysko (2012, p. 52). For instance, *CG* (*computer graphics*) not only performs the designational function due to the lack of a native equivalent but also signifies modernity and technological advancement. Regarding the catachrestic borrowings in the general field, like non-catachrestic borrowings, their symbolic values are generated through language use, and these values allow them to convey pragmatic effects. For example, in the dataset, the catachrestic borrowing **CP**, which has been mentioned in **Section 4.1**, only occurs in light-hearted contexts, such as the topics of characters in TV series or celebrities in the entertainment industry. By contrast, its semantic near-equivalents occur in both light-hearted and serious contexts. The more limited distribution of **CP** suggests that besides its gap-filling function as a catachrestic borrowing, it can also convey entertaining effects and create a relaxing atmosphere.

4.4.3 A Catachrestic Interpretation of Some Non-Catachrestic Borrowings

As catachrestic borrowings can create special pragmatic effects, non-catachrestic borrowings can also fulfill the gap-filling function as catachrestic borrowings do. For example, in Chinese, *emo* is a polysemous word referring to a wide range of negative emotions, such as being anxious, angry, downhearted, and discouraged, as in (14) (Note 4). Although each of its senses corresponds to a Chinese equivalent, there is no Chinese word as semantically generalized as *emo* to cover all these meanings (Note 5). In this sense, *emo* fills a lexical gap that cannot be bridged by any Chinese word. A similar example is *be like*, which in Chinese is used to quote one's gestures, internal dialogue, and direct speech, as in (15). In American English, *be like* has dominated the quotative system partly because it is more functionally versatile than other variants such as *say* which only introduces direct speech (Blyth et al., 1990). Likewise, in Chinese, since the different functions of *be like* have to be performed by different native equivalents, the multifunctionality of *be like* contributes to its acceptability and diffusion in the RL. These borrowings may benefit from their more generalized meanings or multifunctionality as they can be used in a wider range of contexts and their higher frequency makes them more retrievable and more likely to be entrenched in the RL (Chesley & Baayen, 2010, p. 1353). Notably, they are contrary to the catachrestic borrowings with a more specialized meaning relative to the native equivalents, which can perform disambiguating functions. It seems that whether a semantically more specialized or generalized borrowing will be used depends on people's expressive needs. For example, concerning *boss* and its hypernym 反派, 反派 may be favored when speakers want to highlight one's identity as a villain, while *boss* will be used to stress the strong power of the villain. Therefore, both semantically specialized and generalized borrowings serve the same function in that they enrich expression and allow people additional resources to fulfill their different expressive needs.

(14) 王靖雯新歌竟然不 **emo** 了

    *Wang Jingwen xin ge   jingran   bu   **emo**   le*

    Wang Jingwen new song unexpectedly NEG sad   CRS

    'Unexpectedly, Wang Jingwen's new song is not sad.'

(15) 今天的我 be like (贱男人，去死) (Note 6)

    *jintian   de   wo   **be like**   (jiannanren,   qu   si)*

    today   NOM   1sg   be like   (trashman,   go   die)

    'Today I am like (trashman, go to hell).'

4.4.4 Pragmatic Functions Changing with Contexts

The context-dependent nature of pragmatic functions further blurs the boundary between catachrestic and non-catachrestic borrowings. In a certain context, non-catachrestic borrowings may compete with their native equivalents and display pragmatic markedness in their usage. However, in another context, they may serve as a default choice without conveying additional pragmatic effects, thus resembling catachrestic borrowings in the pragmatic dimension. These borrowings tend to be initially restricted to a specific domain as a technical term, which then expand their usage into other fields and take on pragmatic functions (Winter-Froemel & Onysko,

2012, p. 61). To illustrate, the English borrowing *buff* was initially used as a video game term referring to the elements that improve one's skills or game effects. In the context of video games, *buff* is used as a default term with a designational function. By contrast, in other contexts, the use of *buff* instead of its native equivalent 增益 *zengyi* lit. 'enhancement' can create entertaining effects. As in (16), the dairy product of AMX, a brand of a diary enterprise, is compared to buffs in video games to indicate its enhancement to humans' health. In this context, *buff* is pragmatically marked in that the unusual usage of a video game term can create an entertaining and relaxing atmosphere as well as catch attention.

(16) AMX 控糖蓝 **BUFF** 登场

    AMX   *kang-tang*   *lan*   ***buff*** *dengchang*

    AMX   anti-glycation blue buff come.on.stage

    'The AMX anti-glycation blue buff is coming on stage.'

5. Conclusion

Focusing on the English borrowing on China's social media, this study compares English borrowings with their native equivalents and finds out the major functions of English borrowings to explain why they are selected in a certain context by Chinese speakers. Since the traditional terminologies of cultural borrowings versus core borrowings and necessary borrowings versus luxury borrowings are misleading and controversial, the framework proposed by Onysko and Winter-Froemel (2011) is adopted in this study to divide English borrowings into catachrestic and non-catachrestic borrowings. A distinction between the two types of borrowings can be drawn based on the existence of semantic equivalents in the RL. The semantic distinction, at the same time, marks the distinction in their pragmatic functions. By examining the English borrowings collected from Weibo, the study reveals that catachrestic borrowings mainly serve the designational function to fill lexical gaps caused by the lack of native equivalents while non-catachrestic borrowings in competition with native equivalents can perform special pragmatic functions such as creating entertaining effects, projecting a youth image, signifying modernity and internationalism, and being employed for language play to produce amusement. However, the semantically based classification is prone to change with diachronic development, which accordingly results in changes in pragmatic functions. Besides, the pragmatic distinction is much fuzzier since pragmatic functions vary with contexts and pragmatic markedness is not entailed by the availability of native equivalents. This suggests a dynamic boundary between catachrestic and non-catachrestic borrowings.

Although the distinction is not definite, it is still deemed worthwhile to take native equivalents into account and base the classification of borrowings on the availability of alternatives. In this study, it is demonstrated that the onomasiological approach can be used to provide a comprehensive picture of how borrowings function in the RL and that an insight into the specific influencing factors can be gained by applying the notions of catachrestic borrowings and non-catachrestic borrowings. Although pragmatic effects are not always absent from catachrestic borrowings and nor are they always attached to non-catachrestic borrowings, deciding whether a borrowing is catachrestic or non-catachrestic can straightforwardly answer whether the lack of native equivalents is the primary concern in people's selection of a borrowing. If the borrowing is the only lexical option to express a concept, the potential pragmatic effects could be viewed as an accessory factor secondary to the lexical concern. Otherwise, the pragmatic effects of the borrowing could directly lead to its occurrence in a particular context.

In this study, it is confirmed that the framework proposed by Onysko and Winter-Froemel provides a plausible approach to exploring the integration of borrowings into the RL from the pragmatic dimension. Considering the dynamic nature of language, the results of the study only reflect the synchronic scenario. For this reason, more studies could be conducted to trace the future development of English borrowings in Chinese. Besides, this study only examines the data available on social media, so that future studies could expand the scope of the study and investigate borrowings in other genres and registers where the use of English borrowings may serve different functions. Another limitation is that the study is restricted to linguistic data without considering extralinguistic factors, such as age, gender, and socioeconomic class. It is likely that the functions of English borrowings vary with these social factors and depend on the identity of the interlocutors in a conversation. Due to the limited amount of data used, the study cannot effectively shed light on the functions of English borrowings from the social aspects, which may include creating social distance, constructing social identities, etc. Moreover, although some symbolic values of English borrowings are discussed in the study, they are not confirmed by the language users. Therefore, attitudinal research can be conducted in the future to investigate how the speakers actually think of English and whether English really carries prestigious values such as modernity from the language users' perspective.

Abbreviations

1sg	first person singular	CLF	classifier
COP	copula	CRS	currently relevant state
GEN	genitive	Lit.	literal meaning
NEG	negation	NOM	nominalizer
PASS	passive	Q	question marker

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Notes

Note 1. The total number becomes 121 from 119 because two polysemous words are listed twice, namely, *live* and *boss*. Their different meanings do not bear a close correlation.

Note 2. As a borrowing, *boss* was initially used in video games to refer to a significant opponent. It has undergone semantic extension after borrowing and now also denotes powerful opponents in stories.

Note 3. Although in principle catachrestic borrowings can also be involved in language play, all the borrowings used for language play in the dataset are non-catachrestic borrowings. Therefore, language play is included in the section devoted to non-catachrestic borrowings.

Note 4. It is unclear what *emo* is short for. It may originate from *emo*, a type of music with emotional lyrics, or from *emotional* or *emotion*.

Note 5. Polysemous borrowings whose different meanings are correlated can be considered to form a taxonomic relation with their semantic equivalents that correspond to different meanings. For example, *emo* can be viewed

as a hypernym of 失落 *shiluo* 'discouraged'. Similarly, catachrestic borrowings with a more specific meaning also form a taxonomic relation with their native equivalents. However, this study will not consider the former as catachrestic unless some of their meanings do not have a lexicalized equivalent.

Note 6. Given that the hot topic does not contain any quotation, the quotation in the bracket is collected from a post under the hot topic for illustration.

Appendix A

Table 2. List of Catachrestic and Non-Catachrestic Borrowings

English borrowings	Potential Chinese equivalents	Rating (nc/c)
SCI	(科学引文索引期刊)	c
CT	(计算机断层照相技术)	c
DNA	(脱氧核糖核酸)	c
HPV	(人乳头瘤病毒)	c
IP	(文创作品)	c
MCN	(多频道网络)	c
ace	(偶像团体中的王牌成员)	c
kpop	(韩国流行音乐)	c
live	(表演或直播现场）	c
NG	(因演员失误或者笑场而需要重拍的镜头)	c
plog	(图片博客)	c
repo	(粉丝参加现场节目录制后的报告）	c
vlog	(视频博客/短视频）	c
vocal	(歌唱组合中的主唱)	c
wave	(一种舞蹈动作)	c
AA	(平摊费用/各自付钱)	c
BE	(爱情故事的悲惨结局)	c
boss	(强大的反派)	c
CP	(关系亲密的两个人或物）	c
DIY	(自己动手制作)	c
HE	(爱情故事的圆满结局)	c
ootd	(今日穿搭)	c
pose	(为拍照或者画像摆的姿势）	c
reactor	(做出反应的人)	c
wink	(眨一只眼睛)	c
logoshot	(刚过中场进行投篮)	c
CG	(电脑绘制的图形)	c
ETC	(电子不停车收费)	c
live	(动态照片)	c
NGP	(智能导航辅助驾驶)	c
Photoshop	(用 Photoshop 软件处理图像)	c
VCR	(视频片段)	c
AED	除颤仪	nc
ICU	重症监护室，重症监护病房	nc
orthokeratology	角膜塑形术	nc
boss	老板，上司	nc
CBD	中央商务区	nc
CEO	首席执行官	nc
GDP	国内生产总值	nc
HR	人事	nc
IPO	首次公开募股	nc
KPI	关键绩效指标	nc
VIP	贵宾，贵客	nc
BGM	背景音乐	nc
cut	剪辑	nc
cos	角色扮演	nc
disco	迪斯科	nc
demo	样片，样稿	nc
DJ	打碟师	nc
emoji	绘文字	nc

EP	迷你专辑	nc
key	半音	nc
locking	锁舞	nc
mc	主持人，司仪	nc
MV	音乐短片，音乐视频	nc
NPC	非角色玩家	nc
OST	原声带	nc
popping	机械舞	nc
PV	宣传片	nc
rap	说唱	nc
rapper	说唱歌手	nc
slay	惊艳	nc
solo	独奏，独唱，独舞	nc
tv	电视，电视节目	nc
awesome	棒极了	nc
baby	婴儿	nc
battle	比试，比拼	nc
be like	就像，说，心想	nc
blue	蓝色	nc
boy	男孩	nc
cue	提到，提及	nc
cute	可爱	nc
DDL	截止日期	nc
diss	怼，吐槽，反驳	nc
emo	沮丧，抑郁，愁闷，痛苦	nc
ending	结尾	nc
fail	不及格	nc
fan	粉丝	nc
flag	目标	nc
freestyle	即兴发挥	nc
get	理解，领悟，明白，欣赏	nc
ID	游戏名	nc
king	王	nc
logo	标识，徽标	nc
look	穿搭	nc
mini	微型	nc
new	新	nc
nice	好	nc
offer	录用通知	nc
pick	选择，选中	nc
PK	比拼，较量，比试	nc
plus	加强版	nc
privilege	特权	nc
PUA	搭讪艺术家，精神控制	nc
quarter	季度	nc
Queen	女王	nc
reaction	反应	nc
salute	致敬，敬礼	nc
season	季	nc
style	风格	nc
tip	提示，小窍门	nc
UFO	不明飞行物	nc
vs	对比，对阵，对决	nc
young	年轻	nc
ban	禁用	nc
buff	增益	nc
FMVP	总决赛最有价值球员	nc
Game	（一）场，（一）局	nc
Gaming	电子游戏	nc
KO	击倒，打倒	nc
MVP	最有价值球员，全场最佳	nc

AI	人工智能	nc
APP	应用，软件	nc
AR	增强现实	nc
ATM	自动取款机	nc
bug	故障，漏洞	nc
CPU	中央处理器	nc
PC	个人电脑	nc
PPT	幻灯片	nc
SUV	运动型多用途汽车	nc
WiFi	无线网络	nc

Note. c = catachrestic borrowing; nc = non-catachrestic borrowing.

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