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  Learned and popular etymology

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Learned & Popular Etymology:
Prescription vs. Intertextual Paronomasia[1]

In this paper I intend to complain about dismissive attitudes towards so-called popular or false etymology in loan-words and other cases, and propose instead the view that non-etymological echoic adaption of loans is typically intentional and paronomastic, of the same type as echoic retention of surface structure in textual transmission. In the classical tradition of lexical speculation going back to Plato it constitutes an important aspect of intertextual signification.

1. "Popular etymology": Bloomfield's formulation

Leonard Bloomfield's (1933) classic account of loan-words invokes the traditional concept of "popular etymology" to characterise adapted English loan-words such as *groze-berry* > *gooseberry; asparagus* > *sparrow-grass; crevise* > *crayfish* (Bloomfield 1935:450). He notes that the same process also occurs in the development of certain native terms in which obsolete forms have survived as fossils and thus become susceptible to the same changes; his examples are *shamfast* > *shame-faced; samblind* > *sand-blind; bryd-guma* > *bridegroom.* He comments (Bloomfield 1935:423):

(1) So-called popular etymologies are largely adaptive and contaminative. An irregular or semantically obscure form is replaced by a new form of more normal structure and some semantic content — though the latter is often far-fetched.

Bloomfield visualizes the loan as passing through certain stages in its entry into a language: it starts as a foreign-sounding word, and undergoes a process of phonetic adaption until it conforms with native phonology. At this point it has achieved "the status of a loan-form" (2). However Bloomfield appears to regard this status as not altogether a stable one, since the established loan-form is still prone to further adaption (1935:450):

>   (2) Both during the progress towards the status of a loan-form, and after this status has been reached, the structure is likely to be unintelligible. The languages and, within a language, the groups of speakers that are familiar with foreign and semi-foreign forms, will tolerate this state of affairs; in other cases, a further adaption, in the sense of popular etymology, may render the form structurally or lexically more intelligible.

Amongst other things, Bloomfield's concept of "unintelligible structure" must surely give us pause for thought here. Over half a century has passed since Bloomfield wrote, and it is arguably more problematic now than it was then to draw clear lines between "structure" and "meaning". If we succumb to post-structuralist despair in the face of the non-linguistic nature of the *hors-texte*, then the concept of "unintelligible structure" in a word which is otherwise linguistically serviceable is meaningless. In fact this, surely, would also hold for the structuralist Bloomfield. On the other hand, if we opt to accept a traceable link between sign and referent, we find that a loanword which has "achieved native phonology" has only to be associated with its referent — and presumably loanwords do not enter a language without referents — for the hearer to accept it naturally.

2. Bloomfield's formulation in practice
2.0 Monosyllabic constraint on morphemes

One way to make sense of Bloomfield's formulation is to assume a receptor language composed solely of monosyllabic morphemes which normal speakers, if they ever think about it, can pick out as discrete

and coherent entities (which is, of course, one of the definitions of a morpheme). If this language is then exposed to the influx of polysyllabic loanwords, processes of phonetic adaption may bring them into line with native phonology without overcoming the monosyllabic constraint on morphemes, and native speakers may continue (for a time) to try to read complete morphemes into the new non-morphemic syllables. Of course, this formulation assumes that speakers have recourse to morphemic analysis in normal language use, which is by no means given.

2.1 Icelandic

Icelandic is in many ways an example of such a language. Like Old English, it consists mainly of monosyllabic morphemes. Unlike English, however, Icelandic retains vowel-quality in unstressed syllables (which are usually more or less bound structural morphemes).[2] Icelandic morphemic structure has thus remained largely explicit, so that the majority of Icelandic compounds retain the identity of their components. This is even true of most Icelandic placenames, in contrast to the rest of Scandinavia and England. More strikingly, the vocabulary of Icelandic remained essentially that of a pre-technological farming and fishing culture until the British and American occupation during the Second World War, when the Icelandic industrial revolution ran together with the advent of post-war technology. Thus modern Icelandic has very few polysyllabic morphemes, all of them loans, and Icelandic word-formation consists to this day largely of native processes such as stem-compounding and systematic morphological adaption.

But in spite of this relative lack of exposure to loans, which may have created a certain reluctance towards them, Icelandic does not show them significant intolerance in practice. A few polysyllabic morphemes have in fact existed in Icelandic from earliest times, chiefly the handful of Latin ecclesiastical terms exemplified by *ábóti* 'abbot' and the very small number of Irish loans. Middle English loans such as *lávarður*

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[2] See Pétur Helgason (1993:53–68) for evidence of a certain degree of centralisation in unstressed modern Icelandic vowels.

'lord' and later Danish or Low German loans such as *kafteinn* 'captain'
have achieved native status (see below, section 7.1), while modern
colloquial loans, chiefly from English, occur in increasing numbers, in
spite of a strong academic and literary purist attitude which seeks to
promote Icelandic neologisms to replace them. Thus *kassetta* 'compact
cassette' and *videó* 'video (recorder)' are normal colloquial usage,
while the corresponding Icelandicisms *snælda* and *myndband(stæki)*
belong to a rather more formal register.

Thus it is largely within this more formal register that the problem of
foreign polysyllabic morphemes asserts itself today, and this would not
on the face of it appear to be a suitable breeding-ground for the "adap-
tive and contaminative" effects of Bloomfield's "popular etymology".
Yet as we shall see shortly (sections 4.2 and 5.1), it is here within the
formal register that a distinct tendency to indulge in word play emerges.

2.2 English

Bloomfield's discussion centres on English, however, which al-
though starting out with the same monosyllabic morpheme structure
as Icelandic, now swarms with polysyllabic morphemes. The general
weakening of unstressed syllables created a situation whereby it was
no longer always possible to attach a meaning to each syllable, and this
doubtless facilitated the influx of polysyllabic morphemes after the Old
English period. In modern English, new polysyllabic loanwords with
monomorphemic structure, such as *kibbutz* and *glasnost,* are simply
added to the already vast stock of comparable native words such as
rabbit and *concrete.*

I think however that most native English speakers would agree that
kibbutz and *glasnost* do in fact sound more "foreign" than *rabbit* and
concrete. This is doubtless a result of a number of factors, one of
which is probably our awareness of the nationality of their referents.
But Bloomfield's concept of "unintelligible structure" is, I suggest,
not one of these factors. Phonemically these words are composed of
normal English syllables, as becomes clear if we compare *kibbutz*
/kɪ'bʊts/ with *kinetic* /kɪ'netɪk/, *books* /bʊks/ and *foots* /fʊts/. In the

same way *glasnost* /'glæznɒst/ uses the same phoneme sequences as *glad* /glæd/, *jazz* /dʒæz/, *not* /nɒt/, and *lost* /lɒst/. As far as phonemic and morphosyllabic structure is concerned, there is no more reason why *kibbutz* and *glasnost* should undergo further adaption than *rabbit* or *concrete*. Thus although Bloomfield refers to groups of speakers who will "tolerate this state of affairs", he does not actually point to any *intolerable* features of the words he cites. For instance *asparagus* was never any more outlandish than *potato* or *banana*, and anyway *sparrowgrass* never really caught on. The reason why *brydguma* did not survive as **bridegoom* can hardly be its unintelligible structure, since words such as *neighbour* and *husband are* no less "irregular or semantically obscure" or in less need of being "replaced by a new form of more normal structure and some semantic content".

3. Conscious or unconscious processes?

At least part of the problem is that Bloomfield's formulation is confused about the motivation for the changes. At one point he seems to imply that the "adaptive and contaminative" changes are linguistic processes which occur more or less unconsciously on the part of the speakers: the new form has a "more normal structure" and is thus presumably adopted by a process of analogy. This is to be read in the context of his discussion of analogic change a few pages earlier. And yet he speaks of the adapted forms as often having "a facetious connotation" (Bloomfield 1935:421) implying that they are conscious and motivated changes. This is an unresolved contradiction in the formulation.

Of course, at least one of Bloomfield's examples, *sand-blind* from *samblind*, is an almost inevitable orthographic form, since the sequence /-ndb-/ is normally levelled to /-mb-/ in speech so that the word is pronounced as if it were still written *samblind*.[3] In the same way there are doubtless unambiguous examples of loan-words being misunderstood, like "false friends" in translation: an example here might be *pastur-*

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[3] Cf. Gimson (1980:293) on the elision of *d* and (290) on the assimilation of *n* to *m*.

ization for *pasteurization,* where the connection between 'milk' and 'pasture' is compounded by the almost inevitable homophony of the two forms. But it is clearly not enough to say that "adaption and con-tamination" of loans into English will be prompted by the fact that the word does not appear to be composed of familiar morphemes, firstly since this could be said of large numbers of native English words, and secondly since most loans never undergo these changes. Instead, I sug-gest two essential factors: firstly **there must be a pre-existing form in the receptor language to prompt the change,** and secondly **there must be a sanction for paronomasia in the receptor language.** We shall return to this second point shortly (section 7.1).

4. Prescriptive etymology

4.0 *"Etymonic necessity"*

My complaint is that the concept of "popular" or "folk-etymology" is rarely invoked without implications of popular ignorance and error: there is a prescriptive feeling abroad that this is not the way in which the language ought to have developed, and that uneducated people have been stepping out of line. Language change has always been experi-enced by intellectuals — including, I am afraid, no small proportion of the linguists — as a decline in standards. Of course disapproval of "popular etymology" can to some extent be explained by a desire to maintain scholarly standards; but it is disconcerting, to say the least, to find Leonard Bloomfield, writing in 1933 as one of the foremost exponents of descriptive as against prescriptive linguistics, expressing the prescriptive prejudices of an earlier age. Consider, for example, the following from *English Synonyms Discriminated* by W. Taylor of Norwich, published in London in 1850 (xv, xix)

> (3) So much of meaning as inheres in the radical and primary sig-nification of a word is necessarily immortal: but that which has accrued from causal application may die out and disappear ... I have habitually endeavoured, by etymologic investigation, to ascertain of every analysed word the primary sense.

Mr Taylor's delightfully naïve concept of "etymonic necessity" (1850: 128; see "Etymonic" in OED2), by which he means the authority of etymological lineage, takes on a special poignancy in view of his occasional philological fantasies, some worthy of the *Cratylus*. The word *field,* for instance, is a patch of open ground "from which the trees have been *fell'd"* (120).

This attitude (hopefully minus the blunders) still obtained when the twelve-volume edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* appeared in 1933, essentially a re-issue of the *New English Dictionary on Historic Principles* 1884–1928. The 20-volume 1989 Second Edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED2), in spite of the splendours of its computer technology, is really no more than an "amalgamation" (the term is used in the Preface) of all earlier versions and supplements. Thus the etymological information in OED2 is couched almost entirely in the original 19th-century wording, in spite of the fact that an awareness of the distinction between prescriptive and descriptive linguistics has been explicit since the nineteen-thirties and implicit at least since the teachings of Saussure at the beginning of the century. When surface reflection in the guise of Bloomfield's "popular etymology" is evident in the development of a word, OED2, like its predecessors, frequently expresses a measure of disapproval. Here are two examples (the wording is unchanged from the 1933 edition):

(4) Equerry ... The surviving English form is due to an erroneous idea of some connexion with L. *equus* horse; the accentuation on the first syll., favoured by most Dicts. of the present century, is due to the same cause

(5) Pickaxe ... ME. *pikoys, picois,* a. OF. *picois* pickaxe (11th c.), med. L. *picosi-um* ... The later form arose confounding the suffix with axe *sb. Pickis, peckis* survive in s.w. dial.

4.1 The "real meaning" of words

Seen from a hopefully less pre-scribed point of view these formulations introduce at least two misconceptions. In the first place a factor which has a radical effect on the development of a lexical item cannot

be described as "erroneous" without confusing contexts: of course a discontinuity may have occurred in the etymology of the word, but the channels of etymology are not necessarily those of diachronic development. It is as if lexicographers were still blinded by the revelatory insights of the Neogrammarians of the 19th century, who pointed out that linguistic change is essentially a systematic or rule-bound process. In the *Oxford English Dictionary* the revelation has petrified into dogma: whereas the essential Neogrammarian thesis is that exceptions to the rule were due to non-etymological processes such as analogy, the *Oxford English Dictionary* sees them simply as error. Not of course that this was a later development — dogma typically infects the seeds of revelation.

Unfortunately, however, things have hardly changed in some circles since 1850. Here is a quote from Adrian Room's *Dictionary of True Etymologies* more than a century later (Room 1985:2):

> (6) Discovering such true origins is not only interesting, of course, and even entertaining, but also can be important, since it gives us new insight into the meaning of the word, its *real* meaning, and the object or action that it describes. [Author's emphasis.]

Here we still seem to have the full-blown concept of "real meaning" as being enshrined in a word's genes — it is as if the whole panoply of structuralism and post-structuralism had never been. And that's not all — it is also denying Horace and Cicero, Augustine and the Neo-Platonists, even Jerome when he's not being cranky: all of whom have necessarily and explicitly accepted the existence of a prison-house of language. Only the extremes of post-Renaissance pedantry actually seriously voice the desire for a prison-house of etymology.

4.2 Popular and learned error

The second misconception is enshrined in the term "popular etymology", which suggests that the "errors" are perpetrated by an unlearned populace. In fact, however, they are at least as often scholarly as they

are popular. In (4) the association with the Latin word *equus* points to some knowledge of Latin, and the accentuation is stated to be a lexicographical mistake; while (5) clearly implies that the uneducated speakers of non-standard dialects retain the "true", "uncontaminated" forms *pickis* etc. To return to an earlier example, Bloomfield's *sand-blind* is a learned spelling of the etymologically normal spoken form, as are a host of other spellings such as *island* and *doubt,* where the *s* and the *b* are introduced as a result of learned misconceptions. In point of fact any "erroneous" etymological association is by definition learned, since the unlearned speaker does not make etymological associations.

Of course there are also clear examples of word play which seem more likely to have popular than learned origins. But in fact this can never be more than conjecture, since we cannot draw the conclusion that learned minds are not at work whatever the social register of the lexical items concerned. A fairly typical example is that of the Sussex dialect word *festival* 'flute' (Parish 1957:40), which ultimately derives from the Latin *fistula* 'pipe, water-pipe, flute, ulcer'. Its progress towards homonymy with the standard English *festival* is clearly a complex one involving the Old French form *festre,* with *-re* for *-le* (whence standard English *fester*) and other French or English forms derived from the Latin adjectives *festus, festivus* and the Medieval Latin *festivalis.* Thus while it is correct to say that the Sussex word is the result of associations of etymologically unconnected forms, there is no clear evidence to suggest **mis**association as a result of misunderstanding and error. Misunderstanding is of course not to be ruled out, but there is an undeniable hint of learning in the associations made: the retention of the final *l* instead of the French *-re* seems to point to an understanding of the connection with the Latin medical term *fistula.*

5. Neologisms
5.1 Paronomasia and "facetiousness"
Rather than ignorant misrepresentation, I suggest that, in many cases at least, we are dealing with some sort of intentional paronomasia, and the question as to whether learned or unlearned minds are at work is a

side-issue. Even if we can find an example of adaption that is clearly not learned, this does not mean that it is a product of a lack of understanding. Very often it is deliberate and paronomastic, and thus usually touched with humour — which is not necessarily the same as Bloomfield's "facetiousness". Thus the name of a famous London public house, *The Elephant* and *Castle,* has been adapted from *l'Enfant de Castille.* While the Establishment may see this as ignorant misrepresentation of the mob, the sociolinguist will clearly recognise this brilliant downgrading of the original name as pointed social comment.

5.2 Peasant stupidity

The ability to assume stupidity as a formative factor in uneducated speech can lead to surprising conclusions. A good example here is the Icelandic word variously spelt *peysa* or *peisa* 'sweater', traditionally assumed to have entered the language when 19th-century French sailors pointed to an Icelander and said *Voilà un paysan,* which the foolish peasants interpreted as meaning "That's a fine sweater you're wearing". Surprisingly, this simplistic explanation is still often accepted by Icelandic scholars: Örn Ólafsson (1991:98) is representative in offering this word as "the most famous example of misunderstanding resulting in a loan-word". The assumption seems to be that the French term was adopted as a result of a single misunderstanding somewhere in Iceland or Icelandic waters — unless the same misunderstanding occurred spontaneously all over Iceland at about the same time. This incongruous assumption is so tenacious that the new Icelandic Etymological Dictionary (which is refreshingly free from prescriptive attitudes) finds it necessary to mention that the word *peisa* (whose origin is admittedly obscure) is "unlikely to be connected with [*tæpast í ætt við*] the French *paysan* 'farmer'" (Ásgeir Bl. Magnússon 1989, 'peisa').

6. Some echoic examples in Icelandic

Prescriptive etymology is, as we have seen, a relatively recent phenomenon which stems from a basic misunderstanding of the Neogrammarians' vision of language change, and as such is quite out of touch

with the realities of language development. "Etymonic necessity" has never been a formative factor in diachronic linguistics, because diachronic movements in language are synchronically motivated: its immediate development is precipitated, amongst other things, by its current momentum and equilibrium, not past history. But prescriptive etymology has unfortunately left its mark on scholarly attitudes towards paronomastic or echoic intertextual relationships, which tend to be disparaged or at best ignored. Remarkable correspondences remain unexplained. I am thinking for example of the English term *mares' tails* 'streaks of cirrus cloud' and the Icelandic term for the same phenomenon, *maríutásur* or *-tjásur,* literally 'Mary's skeins (of wool)' or 'Mary's locks (of hair)'. A similar case is the echoic similarity between the traditionally most characteristic Icelandic cow's-name, *Búkolla,* and Latin *bucula* 'heifer'. In spite of the resemblance, *bucula* is unlikely to be the single or even main origin of *Búkolla,* since the name is an almost inevitable formation within the context of other names for cows such as *Búbót, Grákolla* and so forth,[4] but it would be unwise to rule out the Latin term as an influencing factor. Icelandic classical scholars of the past, both clergy and laymen, were usually subsistence farmers like their neighbours, and those who had read their Vergil could hardly miss the echo. The Latin term may have contributed to the popularity of the Icelandic name; — or for that matter, we might also recall no less a beast than Alexander's steed *Boukephálas* 'the bull-headed'.

Significantly, too, this echoic tendency seems to continue in modern Icelandic. Several specialist neologisms follow this pattern. One exam-

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[4] Fonnum (1928:61) records the cow's name *Bukoll* in Ål, Hallingdal, Norway, as an isolated instance, not otherwise known and "not native" to Ål, but presumably known elsewhere in Norway; neither Bugge (1918) nor Delgobe (1919) mention *Bukoll(e)* among their cows' names. (I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer for these references.) However Fonnum reports other names in *Bu-* as common in Ål, and also that the final element *-koll* 'poll' was mandatory for hornless cows (Fonnum 1928:69). In Iceland today horned cows are extremely rare, and the element *-kolla* has lost its limited signification, if it ever had it. Conceivably an original "hornless" connotation might strengthen the association with *bucula* (immature heifers are presumably hornless), but I mention the point only as a curiosity.

ple is the neuter noun *gistur,* literally 'temporary lodging', which was recorded in the first edition of the Icelandic lexicon of terms for the computer for the term *register* 'temporary holding-point for data during computation' (*Tölvuorðasafn* 1983:21). At first sight the word appears to be a slightly unusual — although not unacceptable — formation from the the the verb *gista* 'to stay overnight', but a cross-reference to an alternative form *registur* (*Tölvuorðasafn* 1983:27) betrays its provenance. In the second edition of the lexicon (*Tölvuorðasafn* 1986:52) the word has been replaced by the neuter noun *gisti* which is possibly more acceptable as a formation from the verb, while *registur* has been dropped; progressive normalisation has thus obscured the original echo. A similar example is *sperrt raddglufa,* lit. 'wide-open voice-chink' which is used by Icelandic linguists for the phonetic feature 'spread glottis' (cf. Eiríkur Rögnvaldsson 1984:46). Icelandic *sperrt* 'cocked, stretched' is etymologically unrelated to the English *spread*; while the term *glufa* 'gap, chink', which reflects the *gl* of the English *glottis,* has been chosen from a number of Icelandic words meaning 'gap' such as *bil, gap, op, rauf,* some at least as appropriate as *glufa.*[5] *Raddglufa* (literally 'voice-chink') is the generally accepted term for 'glottis'.

Other, more commonplace coinages, show varying echoic correspondences with their sources. The common term *fjárfesting,* literally 'money-fastening', was reputedly introduced in the 1940's by the politician and economist Gylfi Þ. Gíslason to translate the English term *investment*: the middle syllable of the two words are almost identical. A later coinage is *eyðni* 'AIDS' suggested in 1985 by the writer and meteorologist Páll Bergþórsson. The term is a formation from the verb *eyða* 'wipe out, lay waste, wear away', and distinctly echoes its source: the root vowel is a long /ei/ in both words, while Icelandic *ð* has a phonological and graphological relationship to *d*. Interestingly, however, the echoic nature of the coinage was not mentioned in the newspaper con-

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[5] Halldór Ármann Sigurðsson suggests that this term originated in a paronomastic mood during Höskuldur Þráinsson's classes at the University of Iceland, and an anonymous reviewer points out that its echoic nature is probably prompted by the need to retain the international abbreviation for the feature: [±sp.gl.] (private communications).

troversy that sprang up in 1987 on the suitability of the new term as against other (non-echoic) contenders, although various authorities were quoted to the effect that *eyðni* conformed exactly to Icelandic rules of word-formation, was short and succinct and had the advantage of referring exclusively to the disease in question (*Þjóðviljinn* 1987:2; *Heilbrigðismál* 1987:5).

Echoic coinages are also to be found in the spoken language. It is easy to see how this comes about: there is a strong tendency among Icelanders who are fluent in a more cosmopolitan language — usually English — to introduce foreign forms into their speech, particularly when discussing subjects which they are used to discussing in the language concerned. Professionals, for instance, frequently use forms such as *kontakt* and *tendens* instead of the native *samband* and *til-hneiging*. Language-conscious speakers will take pains to avoid these forms, even hesitating to find the right Icelandic word when everyone listening has the same foreign term on the tip of their tongues. But searching for the right word is a complex exercise which wanders over the borderline between conscious and unconscious activity, easily stirring up Freudian displacements and making the sort of echoic connections we have been examining. There is no doubt, for example, that this is the process behind the recent fondness in the media for the new term *ásættanlegur* which distinctly echoes its English translation 'acceptable',[6] and has come to be used of agreements and negotiations instead of the native *viðunandi*. It can also lead to semantic shifts in the existent lexis: thus my impression is that *fýsilegur* 'desirable' (the first syllable rhymes with *fleece*) has moved towards the meaning of English *feasible*, especially in phrases such as *fýsilegur kostur* 'a feasible alternative'. Similar processes should also be considered as concomittant factors in correspondences such as *Búkolla* mentioned

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[6] The correspondence becomes clearer if we consider the Icelandic pronunciation of the first two syllables of the two words: ['auːsaiht] and ['ahkseft]. The first syllables, both stressed, are both heavy (V: and VCC), while since Icelandic monophthongal and diphthongal length are phonologically identical, the second syllables both have short vowels followed by unvoiced fricatives 'buffering' the following [t].

above, as well as established neologisms such as the late medieval *ímynd* 'image' which seems to echo *imago*.[7] Semantic extensions of native terms can also occur in the same way; an example is *ás* 'beam, rafter, ridge' which the Written Language Archive of the Icelandic Institute of Lexicography (WLA) first records in the sense 'axis' in the nineteenth century.[8] An early extension of *ás* to mean 'axle' probably dates from the introduction of wheel technology. While *ás* and *axis* are not related there is cognation between the Latin *axis,* Old English *eaxl* and Old Icelandic *öxl* 'shoulder', and Icelandic *öxull* 'axle' (whence the English word), and it is clear that the semantic development of these and allied terms is compounded by the processes of echoism that we have been discussing, processes which are quite independent of etymological considerations.

7. Echoic processes

7.1 Morphosyllabic factors

Having looked at several examples of echoic loans we should return briefly to the second motivating factor I suggested at the end of section 3: the existence of a sanction in the language for paronomasia. This would seem to raise the question of whether paronomasia is a linguistic universal; but in fact all I wish to suggest is that certain languages may be structured in ways that encourage or discourage paronomasia.

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[7] I have not found earlier occurrences of *ímynd* than in Oddur Gottskálksson's 1540 Bible translation (*Nýja Testamenti Odds Gottskálkssonar*) — it is not recorded in Larsen 1891 and does not appear in the Old Icelandic Corpus at the Institute of Linguistics, University of Iceland. Oddur uses the noun *ímynd* 7 times: on four occasions (333, 384, 429, 433) for *imago,* twice (392, 422) for *forma,* and once (470) for *figura*: he also uses the middle voice of the verb *ímyndast* (406) to translate the passive *formari*. Assuming for ease of argument that *ímynd* is in fact Oddur's coinage, its distribution here would illustrate the point that, once established, the echoic neologism is immediately available for use in other contexts, and is thus not necessarily a conscious allusion on the translator's part.

[8] WLA first records *ás* as a translation of *axis* in Björn Gunnlaugsson (1865:348). ("Taka menn sér beina línu, lagða helzt í gegnum boglínu miðja, sem þá kallast ás (axis) einnig abscissulína"). The unconnected form *ás* 'heathen god' was similarly extended in classical Icelandic to mean 'the ace (at dice)'.

Mathematically speaking, it is clear that a language with a mono-syllabic constraint on native morphemes will *ceteris paribus* have a smaller range of possible morphemic phoneme-sequences to choose from than a language without this constraint. Given a fairly normal lexicon-size, such a language will presumably already have used a greater proportion of its syllabic possibilities than a typically polysyllabic morphemic language. This means that incoming alien syllables from loan-words are more likely to tally with existing native morphemes.

This can be seen in the Icelandic loanwords discussed in section 2.2: both *ábóti* 'abbot' and *kafteinn* 'captain' have undergone normal processes of adaption to conform to Icelandic phonology, but are nevertheless composed of sequences which are identical to native morphemes: *ábót* is an existent noun meaning 'second helping', composed of *á* 'on' + *bót* 'remedy, addition' + *i* (weak nom.sg. inflection); and *kafteinn* could be broken down as *kaf* 'submersion' + *teinn* 'rod'. Of course, both these analyses invoke completely irrelevant connotations, and must in practice be ignored. However, whenever incoming loans strike up resonances with existing morphemes which are or could become semantically relevant, the conditions are clearly set for paronomastic adaption.

Greenberg and Ruhlen (1992) discuss the statistical likelihood of chance similarities between unrelated languages. In the ensuing discussion in the Internet *LINGUIST Discussion List* several contributors (Golla, 1992; Nevin 1992; cf. Ringe 1992) suggested that such coincidences are more frequent than is generally assumed. I would suggest that the probability of such coincidences is likely also to be dependent on morphosyllabic factors such as those discussed in this section.

7.2 Intertextual factors

Echoic migration of phonological/graphological structures between languages is not only a significant factor in diachronic development, but can also play a decisive role in textual transfer. Its presence is for

instance pervasive in manuscript transmission between related dialects
in the medieval Germanic corpus (Pétur Knútsson 1993a), and can also
be seen as an essential element in networks of Old English and Old
Icelandic poetic formulae (Pétur Knútsson 1993b).

Not infrequently, echoic intertextual phenomena lie at the heart of
textual signification. A fine example of this is St. Augustine of Hippo's
concept of the "distension" of time, which he discussed most fully
in Book XI of the *Confessions,* and for which he appears to have
introduced a new word into Latin: *distentio.* This is an essential aspect
of his concept of an extratemporal deity whose works are nevertheless
temporal, and to which he returns time and time again in the *City of
God* ("Nam temporalia movens temporaliter non movetur", X.xii, PL
XLI:291).

Important for our understanding of this Neoplatonic concept is our
knowledge of the provenance of Augustine's coinage *distentio*; but it
would be a mistake to rely, like Taylor and Room, on the etymological
provenance. Henry Chadwick (1991:240n) suggests that he is influ-
enced by Plotinus's term *diastasis,* 'extension, dimension; separation'
(cf. Sleeman 1980:246). Here are the two terms in their contexts:

(7) inde mihi visum est nihil esse aliud tempus quam disten-
tionem; sed cuius rei nescio; et mirum si non ipsius animi.
'For me, this means that time is nothing more than a disten-
sion; of what I'm not sure, but it could well be of the mind
itself'
(Confessions XI.xxvi (33), PL XXXII:822)
(8) ecce distentio est vita mea
'clearly my life is a distension'
(Confessions XI.xxix (39), PL XXXII:825)
(9) diastasis oun zôês khronon eikhe.
'So the diastasis of life involves time'
(Enniades III.7.11, Armstrong 1967:340)

The two words *distentio* and *diastasis* have a complex relationship.
The prefixes *dis-* and *dia-* are cognate; according to Ernout and Meillet

(1951:176) the -*s* of *dis-* is a later addition, cf. *abs* from *ab*, unconnected with the earlier **disa* for Greek *dia*. But the second elements are not related; Latin -*tentio* is from *tendo* 'stretch' (Pok. *ten-* 1065), while Greek *stasis* is from *histêmi* 'stand' (Pok. *sta-* 1004). An exact Latin cognate would be *distantia* (which actually occurs at this point in Ficino's 15th cent. Latin translation of Plotinus, Ficino 1855). Augustine's *distentio* has an exact cognate in Greek *diatasis* 'tension, dilation, extension', a term carrying the pathological meaning 'dilation, diseased swelling' which also adheres to *diastasis*. Thus *tasis* and *stasis* also have an intertextual relationship in Greek.

But Augustine is hardly concerned with exact cognation; he would have been more likely to make associations along the same lines as the *Cratylus*, exemplified by Bede (12) below. This does not mean however that linguistic relationships do not concern him: he is keenly aware of language, and discusses the sequential nature of speech-sounds as part of his explanation of time and eternity (*Confessions* XI.xxviii (38), PL XXXII:824). He is also concerned to find suitable Latin terms for Greek concepts. For instance he discusses at length the coinage *essentia*, by then a well-established calque from the Greek *ousia* 'essence' (*City of God* XII.ii, PL XLI:350). He inherits, in fact, a terminological framework which is shot through with etymological and non-etymological intertextual echoes. The Old Latin scriptures that Augustine knew echo the surface form of the Septuagint time and time again. A typical example occurs in Psalm 16.2 (which Augustine quotes in the same form as the Vulgate):

(10) Augustine:
  Deus meus es tu, quoniam bonorum meorum non *eges*
  'You are my God, for you *need* not my goods.'
    (*City of God* X.v, PL XLI:281)

(11) Septuagint:
  ... hoti tôn agathôn mou ou khreian *ekheis*
  '... for you *have* no need of my goods'
    (Ps.16.2)

where the echo between the verbs *egeo* 'want, lack' and *ekhó* 'have' is neither etymological nor, I submit, fortuitous.[9]

7.3 Conclusion

Here, then, at the very heart of Augustine's thought, is a clear demonstration of the intertextual nature of signification. The important point in this discussion, however, is the surface (graphological-phonological) nature of the elements concerned; we are dealing with non-systematic echoic correspondences which override morphemic structure and pay no heed whatsoever to "etymonic necessity". We have the following situation:

    (a) the correspondences concerned have intertextual significance for the semantics of the terms involved

    (b) the correspondences reside in the surface (graphological-phonological) structure

    (c) the correspondences are non-systematic insofar as they are not diachronically related, and insofar as they have no transformational connections with any putative deep structure (interestingly for those who see significance in the parallels between diachronic and TG relationships, it seems that these parallels are also pertinent here in their absence.)

In short, we have a semantic element which resides entirely in the graphological-phonological constituent and cannot be associated with underlying structure. Since most of the examples considered above involve migration not only between texts but also between languages, we also have a problem for translation. In both cases, the traditional

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[9] *Egeo* can be connected with Icel. *ekla* 'scarcity' (Ernout 1951:192; Ásgeir Bl. Magnússon 1989:150), while *ekhô* is from **segh-* 'hold' (Pok. 888; cf. Germanic **sigiz-* victory, Skr. *sáhate*). — The observant reader may have detected another echo here, which had escaped me until this paper was going to print. The correspondence between *eges* and *ekheis* in (10) and (11) also occurs between '*ecce* distentio ... ' in (8) and 'diastasis ... *eikhe*' in (9). Is this coincidental, or another unconscious association triggering Augustine's choice of words?

GT-based paradigms cannot accommodate the processes we have been examining.

8. Epilogue: the Venerable Bede

For medieval scholars, crucial aspects of textual signification were incorporated in the surface structure of words. In his *De Computi Ratione,* Bede repeatedly poses the question *Unde dictum est?* 'Where does the term come from?': *dies* 'day' is that which 'divides' (*disjungat ac dividat*) the light from the darkness (PL XC:580c), and *nox* 'night' is that which is said to impair (*noceat*) the sight and hamper man's activities (582a). A good example of this method occurs in his spelling handbook *De orthographia liber,* (PL XC:123–150), where he makes a note of the fact that the word *sermo* 'discourse' is composed of the verbs *sero* 'connect in a row' and *moveo* 'move' (PL XC:150d):

> (12) VERBUM est omne quod lingua profertur et voce; SERMO autem, cuius nomen ex duobus compositum, serendo et movendo, comptior ac diligentior sit; SENTENTIA vero quæ sensu concipitur.
>
> 'VERBUM is the core term for speech; SERMO is more succinct, incorporating both 'sero' and 'moveo'; SENTENTIA refers to the semantic content.'

Bede is guilty here of false etymology in a way which would make the pedants pounce on him with glee. But he is not concerned with systematic rules of language change, which were not formulated in his day. He is working instead within the classical framework of lexical speculation which again goes back, through Augustine for one, to Plato's *Cratylus.* His statement that the syllables *ser* and *mo* can be associated with other meanings is cogent and instructive in that he is invoking intertextual signification on a pragmatic level, and giving us an important insight into the semantic values he attaches to the word. He is consciously analysing the interface between form and meaning, and as such he is making a compelling epistemological statement on language and signification.

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ÚTDRÁTTUR

Í umfjöllun sinni um alþýðuskýringar gerir Bloomfield (1935:450) ráð fyrir því að tökuorð sem falla illa að málkerfi stjúpmálsins eigi á hættu að afbakast vegna tilrauna manna til að aðlaga þau málkennd sinni. Hér komi til krafan um að orð hafi „skiljanlega formgerð" — á íslensku er talað um „gegnsæi" orðmynda. Í þessari grein er aftur á móti sett fram sú skoðun að breytingarnar eigi sér stað að uppfylltum tveimur skilyrðum: að í stjúpmálinu séu þegar fyrir hendi orðmyndir sem svipar til formgerðar tökuorðsins; og að aðstæður fyrir orðaleiki í stjúpmálinu séu góðar. Rök eru leidd að því að slíkar aðstæður séu fyrir hendi í íslensku.

Hugtakið *alþýðuskýring* er villandi, í fyrsta lagi vegna þess að þær breytingar sem átt er við eru ekki endilega runnar undan rifjum ómenntaðs fólks. Þegar um raunverulegar tilraunir til upprunaskýringar er að ræða hljóta þær í flestum tilvikum að vera lærðar, því ólærðir stunda ekki orðsifjafræði. Í öðru lagi er í mörgum tilvikum alls ekki um að ræða skýringartilgátu heldur einfaldlega tengingu við önnur morfem málsins sem liggja vel við hvað varðar merkingu og form, án þess að neinar upprunahugmyndir séu með í spilinu. Slíkar tengingar eru gjarnan meðvitaðar og stundum er um að ræða orðaleiki.

Svipaðrar tilhneigingar gætir oft þegar nýyrði eru mynduð til að þýða erlend hugtök, eða þegar formi eða merkingu innlendra orðmynda er hnikað til vegna áhrifa frá erlendri fyrirmynd. Ekki eru þessi áhrif ætíð meðvituð. Af sama toga eru hljóðfræðilegar líkingar milli skyldra og óskyldra orða sem tengja saman hugtök í textum á mismunandi tungumálum, bæði sem ómeðvituð textatengsl (intertextualities) og sem hreinar tilvitnanir.

Þessar orðmyndir eru glögg dæmi um merkingarfræðilega þætti sem felast eingöngu í yfirborðsgerð málsins. Ekki er unnt að rekja tengsl þeirra við meintar baklægar gerðir textans, enda eru þessir þættir að sama skapi fullkomlega óháðir díakrónskri málgreiningu.

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