ENGLISH DISCOURSE MARKERS IN SPOKEN ROMANIAN: PRAGMATIC BORROWINGS OR A CODE-SWITCHING PHENOMENON?

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Abstract. The English influence on present-day spoken Romanian is pervasive to such an extent that even English words whose main function is pragmatic have been borrowed. Although these words, known in literature as 'discourse markers', have a peripheral role at the propositional level, they are multifunctional at pragmatic and discourse levels, and are susceptible in interaction to code-switching and borrowing. In this paper we analyze English discourse markers used in spoken Romanian (*Jesus!, oh my God!, what!?, by the way, so, anyway, also, eventually, apparently,* etc.) from a corpus of informal Romanian conversations from the Internet (social media, blogs, etc.). What is of interest here is to explain why such attitudinal, personal elements have been borrowed and are so frequently used when Romanian has its own means to express the same functions. Moreover, the analysis focuses on establishing whether such instances are pragmatic borrowings or code-switching.

Keywords: English influence, Romanian, discourse markers, code-switching, pragmatic borrowing.

1. INTRODUCTION

English is undoubtedly the most spread language all over the world being currently used as a default means of global intercultural communication and as a global *lingua franca* in domains such as business, politics, science, tourism, technology, media, etc. (House 2011: 607). The number of bilinguals and multilinguals, who speak English besides their mother tongue and other languages, is increasing all over the world. This in turn leads to another interesting phenomenon: English is being used not only as a means of intercultural communication (where speakers with different native languages are involved), but also as a discourse strategy by non-native English interactants inside a monolingual community.

The English influence on Romanian has been an important topic among Romanian linguists (Avram 1997, Stoichițoiu Ichim 2005, 2006, Niculescu-Gorpin and Vasileanu 2016, 2017) especially since the beginning of the '90s, when a huge "wave of anglicisms" entered the language through post-communist media (Stoichițoiu Ichim 2006: 7). Most of these studies concern lexical and morphological variation of anglicisms in relation with standardisation and norming mechanisms of the language. The present study focuses on the

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effects of English influence on Romanian informal conversations from social media, particularly on linguistic interference at interactional level where we can witness instances of intra- and inter-sentential code-switching, lexical and pragmatic borrowings which, as we will see in the following examples, bear high emotional charge alongside several discourse and pragmatic strategies of marking the speaker's attitude, highlighting a contrast, signaling a switch of topic, etc.

In section 2 we will discuss the language contact phenomena of code-switching and borrowing and their effects on the pragmatic level of the discourse in general, and on the class of discourse markers in particular, explaining their susceptibility to linguistic transfer. In section 3 we will analyze examples of English discourse markers and in section 4 we will try to see whether English discourse markers are instances of code-switching or pragmatic borrowings.

2. INTERFERENCE PHENOMENA

2.1. Code-switching

When two languages are in contact, especially inside a bilingual community, a series of deviations from the norms of either language may occur. These linguistic deviations, seen as manifestations of language contact and mixing in the speech of bilinguals, are called interference phenomena and variously include code-switching, borrowing on lexical and syntactic levels, language transfer, linguistic convergence, etc. (Weinreich 1974, Poplack 1980, 2004).

Code-switching is often defined as "the ability of bilinguals to alternate effortlessly between their two languages" (Bullock and Toribio 2009: 1), "the alternation of two languages within a single discourse, sentence or constituent" (Poplack 1980: 583), "the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems" (Gumperz 1982: 59), and it refers to contact-induced synchronic variation in the language (Andersen 2014: 21). Shana Poplack (1980: 614) in her paper on code-switching *Sometimes I'll start a sentence in Spanish Y TERMINO EN ESPANOL…* differentiates three types of code-switching: **intra-sentential code-switching** which refers to switching units inside a sentence, **inter-sentential** or **extra-sentential code-switching** which means switching sentences or bigger sequences of discourse, and **tag-switching** or **emblematic (code-)switching** which indicate the transfer of tags, interjections, idiomatic expressions and discourse markers from one language to another.

Romanian speakers belonging to a certain social group or category, like teen groups or young adults, who are exposed to English through daily contact with social media, may commute between languages even if not all members are fluent in English. In doing so they attempt to attain, consciously or unconsciously, discourse and pragmatic functions "of distinguishing new from old information, marking the degrees of emphasis or contrastiveness, separating topic from subject, or signalling the speaker's position vis-à-vis his message" (Gumperz 1982: 48). Commuting between languages also serves the role of social identification with a group that share the same background features such as age, education, interests, values, goals, etc.

In (1) below there is a sequence from a conversation between two members of the same group (male, co-workers, with ages between 25-27, having the same interests, both

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fluent in English, friends). They talk about solving a linguistic problem with codified data from Romanian and Portuguese. Speaker A found it difficult to break the code, although he knew what languages are involved. Speaker B finds this comment arrogant and is saying that the code is easy to break. Speaker A defends himself criticizing Speaker's B answer. The way the speakers commute affects not only the lexical and grammatical level, but also the pragmatic level of the language. Speaker A switches to English in a face-threatening act perhaps to mitigate the effects of his direct criticism on speaker B, because it is believed that English has a higher degree of neutrality.

(1) 1 A: Eu să mor dacă m-am prins. Gen ştiam că e română, dar nu m-am prins de cuvinte.
2 B: Eşti arogant, A. Eu m-am prins şi din portugheză de la articole. De ce nu schimbăm 'l' cu 'r' **btw** [by the way]?
3 A: Nu sunt arogant. **You're too eager to show off and you don't want to understand that you are meant to solve the problem in order to get an objective opinion, not just to rub it in our face that you're so smart that you managed to decode it** [...]
4 B: E amuzant... **but** mă rog :))
5 A: Ți-a verificat cineva răspunsurile? **Actually it doesn't matter now since you decoded it**.
6 B: M-am uitat la fiecare exemplu să văd dacă se poate deduce şi … părerea **honest** :)) probabil m-aş fi prins **eventually** că e vorba de română **anyway**. (CoPers)

'1 A: I'll be damned if I get it. Like I knew it is Romanian, but I couldn't find the words.
2 B: You are arrogant, A. I got it from Portuguese, from the articles. Why don't we replace 'l' with 'r' **btw** [by the way]?
3 A: I am not arrogant. **You're too eager to show off and you don't want to understand that you are meant to solve the problem in order to get an objective opinion, not just to rub it in our face that you're so smart that you managed to decode it** [...]
4 B: It is funny… **but** whatever :))
5 A: Did someone check your answers? **Actually it doesn't matter now since you decoded it**.
6 B: I've looked at each example to see if it is possible to deduce and … it seemed **honest** :)) Probably I would **eventually** have got it that it is Romanian **anyway**.'

Obviously, we are dealing here with cases of interference phenomenon (*btw*, *You're too eager to…*, *but*, *Actually it doesn't matter…*, *eventually*, *anyway*, *honest*) which most linguists would describe as examples of code-switching. However, if we consider examples from (1) we can see that the insertion of these elements is accompanied by the transfer of pragmatic functions they bear in the source language, i.e. English: change of topic (1 *btw*), signaling a contrast (*but*), supporting an idea mentioned before (1(3A)).

In his study on English-based expletives, interjections, discourse markers, tags, response markers that have emerged in Norwegian, Gisle Andersen (2014: 18) argues that the insertion of pragmatic items which carry signals about speaker attitudes, the speech act performed, discourse structure, etc. are instances of pragmatic borrowing and may be

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characterized by functional stability or functional adaptation in the transfer from the source language to the recipient language.

2.2. Borrowing

In the study mentioned above, Andersen distinguishes between **code-switching** "contact-induced synchronic variation in the language of bilingually competent speakers", **pragmatic borrowing** "contact-induced language change" (Andersen 2014: 21). According to the author, pragmatic borrowing "concerns the incorporation of pragmatic and discourse features of a source language into a recipient language" and differ from lexical and nonce borrowing. Although pragmatic borrowings tend to be recurrent in the speech of the individual and widespread across the community becoming at a certain point available to monolingual speakers in the same manner as lexical borrowings do, still they are not the same phenomenon.

Lexical borrowings are assimilated morphologically, syntactically, and often, phonologically in the recipient language and they do not necessarily include the whole range of functions and meanings of an item in a source language. Their adaptation involves conceptual narrowing, broadening and shift, a dynamism that characterizes pragmatic borrowings too, however in their case the adaptation does not rely on the conceptual reference of the word, but on the speaker attitude (Andersen 2014: 18). As for nonce borrowings, they are more similar to single word code-switching being neither recurrent nor widespread, and requiring a certain level of bilingual competence (Poplack 2004: 590).

2.3. Linguistic interference at the level of discourse markers

The transfer of discourse markers from one language to another has aroused the interest of many researchers concerned with the issue of languages in contact and the effects of bilingualism on this class of "peripheral" words (Maschler 2000, de Rooij 2000, Goss and Salmons 2000, Torres and Potowski 2008, Matras 2000, Andersen 2014). The concepts used to describe the transfer of discourse markers from one language to another vary among: "code-switching" (Maschler 2000, de Rooij 2000), "tag-switching" (Poplack 1980, Bullock and Toribio 2009), "emblematic (code) switching" (Goss and Salmons 2000), "borrowing" (Torres and Potowski 2008, Matras 1998, 2000, de Rooij 2000) and "pragmatic borrowing" (Andersen 2014). In spite of various approaches and methods in analyzing linguistic interference at the level of discourse markers, the authors cited above agree that this class of words have a higher degree of borrowability due to their phonological, syntactic, semantic and functional features.

Discourse markers constitute a dynamic and heterogeneous functional category that includes adverbs (*now, actually, anyway*), coordinating and subordinating conjunctions (*and, but, because*), interjections *(oh, gosh, boy*), verbs (*say, look, see*), and clauses (*you see, I mean, you know*). According to Brinton (1996), discourse markers have been often marginalized due to the difficulty to place within a traditional word class since they are semantically opaque, having little or no propositional meaning. Syntactically, they are optional, occurring outside the syntactic structure or being loosely attached to it. They form a separate tone group being short and phonologically reduced. They are one of the most

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perceptually salient features of oral style where they appear with high frequency. They are multifunctional, simultaneously operating on several linguistic levels[2].

The items from this category fulfill a wide range of pragmatic roles as connectors, turn-takers, confirmation seekers, intimacy signals, topic switchers, hesitation markers, boundary markers, fillers, prompters, repair markers, attitude markers, hedging devices, etc. (Jucker and Ziv 1998: 1). While discourse markers are grammatically optional and semantically empty, they are not pragmatically optional or superfluous. If such markers are omitted, the discourse is grammatically acceptable, but would be judged unnatural, disjointed, boring, or unfriendly, within the communicative context (Svartvik 1979, *apud* Müller 2005: 1).

These multifunctional words and phrases whose distribution and meaning are opaque and which seem to be grammatically optional constitute a non-homogeneous class of linguistic items always open to new enterings which might explain the easy borrowing between languages. Examining French discourse markers in Shaba Swahili discourse, Vincent de Rooij (2000) notices that the motivation to alternate languages at discourse markers has to do with highlighting contrast and thus maximizing the saliency of their functions (*apud* Maschler 2000: 439). De Rooij claims that French markers contrast with their linguistic environment and, hence, are more salient than native markers. Consequently, the speaker's intention to code-switch becomes a discourse strategy *per se*, a contextualization cue "that contributes to the signalling of contextual presuppositions" (see Gumperz 1982: 131).

According to Matras (2000), motivation for switching at discourse markers is a cognitive process, rather than strategic, based on the nonseparation of the systems. Matras suggests the concept of a "pragmatically dominant language", *i.e.* the language towards which a speaker directs maximum mental effort at a given instance of linguistic interaction. Pragmatic borrowings and code-switches are motivated in those communities where speakers identify themselves with dominant language and culture.

3. DATA

The analyzed discourse markers from the examples below have been chosen based on our direct observations of spontaneous speech in nonformal interactions with friends, colleagues, and other Romanian speakers. We noted down the most frequent discourse markers and checked their occurrences on the internet using the Sketch Engine Concordance for Romanian corpora (roTenTen16) with over 2 billion words and the reference electronic corpus for contemporary Romanian (CoRoLa) which contains over 1 billion of word forms. We also used examples from our personal corpus (CoPers) which mainly contains chat mediated conversations.

The types of English discourse markers that appear in Romanian conversation are: discourse connectors (*so, but, also, anyway, by the way, and,* etc.) used to organize discourse establishing cohesion and coherence by connecting two units of speech, or by signaling a topic switch, filling a pause, etc.; modal markers (*eventually, apparently, basically, I don't know, who knows, whatever*) that show the speaker opinion, belief,

[2] For more linguistic features of discourse markers see Brinton (1996: 33–35), Müller (2005: 4–9).

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position, commitment regarding a situation; attitude markers which are emotionally charged (*Jesus!, oh, my God!, no way, what?!*); interactional markers (*you know, let me know, right, really(?)*) that usually function as confirmation seekers or confirmation markers. Due to their multifunctionality it is difficult to group discourse markers into distinct categories as very often their functions overlap.

In this section we will analyze the discourse connectives *so* ((2)–(7)), *anyway* ((8)–(14)), whose main functions are to signal relation inside discourse, the attitudinal markers *Jesus!* ((15)–(17)), *oh, my God!* ((18)–(22)), that function at intermediate level signaling the relations between interlocutors and the discourse.

3.1. *So*

One predominant discourse function of *so* is to conclude or to make a final statement as we can see in the examples below ((2)–(4)). Usually it precedes the discourse sequence that codifies the conclusion. In example (2), *so* appears in the same context with its Romanian counterpart *deci* that introduces a comment regarding a state of facts. These two functions of introducing a comment and concluding a statement are available in both languages, but for some reasons, the speaker selects different lexical representations for the same discourse marker. One possible explanation is to avoid repetition, which sometimes is stylistically stigmatized. Another reason could be the speaker's intention to highlight the sequence that contains the conclusion by choosing a more salient discourse marker.

(2) Ok, **deci**, o singură chestie: "be" nu se poate face cu nimic din tabel, iar eu mă gândisem la 'bolnav', **so** pune asta în tabel. (CoPers)

'Ok, **so**, one thing: it is not possible to make "be" with anything from the table, and I was thinking of "bolnav", **so** put this in the tabel.'

(3) A: Mai bine vorbim direct.
B: adică?
C: Adică stop chatting **so** vorbim altă dată. (CoPers)

'A: It is better to talk directly.
B: what do you mean?
C: It means stop chatting **so** let's talk another time.'

(4) A fost V. la fata aia la secretariat şi vrea să îi dăm foaia de acord cu semnăturile comisiei de îndrumare, nu primeşte fără ele. **So**, bad news. (CoPers)

'V. went to that girl from the secretary office and [found out that she] wants from us the agreement paper signed by committee members. She will not receive [our files] without them. **So**, bad news.'

Usually *so* accompanies other discourse markers: *so I don't know*, *so apparently*, *so basically*, *so oops, ok, so* ((5)–(7)), forming clusters where each element has its own functions. In other words, they don't operate as single functional groups, but as individual elements whose features might reinforce each other's roles in discourse. For example, in (5) *so* introduces new information as the next part of the story, while *apparently* indicates that

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the speaker is not taking the full responsibility for its truth, that the statement is based on the external sources, hearsay or inference in this case. In example (7) *so* shows that the continuity is disrupted by a switch of topics. Both markers, *ok* and *so*, play here similar roles of attracting the interlocutor's attention and changing the conversation topic. In (6) it serves as a decoding device signaling that something is wrong and should not have happened.

(5) **So apparently** a aplicat să fie voluntar în Latvia. (CoPers)
'**So, apparently**, he applied to be a volunteer in Latvia.'

(6) [Problema] 3 era mult writing system, Middle Persian. Un german îmi zise că îl ajută că ştie persană. **So oops** (CoPers)
'Problem 3 had a lot of writing system, Middle Persian. A German told me that knowing Persian helped him. **So oops**'

(7) **Ok, so,** Ioana avu o idee interesantă (CoPers)
'**Ok, so**, Ioana had an interesting idea.'

3.2. *Anyway*

The discourse marker *anyway* is one of the most spread English discourse markers in Romanian informal conversations due to its large spectre of discourse strategies. It is often used to end a conversation ((8)-(10)), to change the subject (10), to confirm or support a point or an idea just mentioned ((11), (12)), to denote that something is true although something else might have happened to prevent it (13), to resume a subject after interruption (14).

(8) **Anyway**, poate ne vedem când mă întorc. (CoPers)
'**Anyway**, maybe we meet when I come back.'

(9) **Anyway** fiecare cu viziunea si opinia [sa]. (roTenTen16)
'**Anyway**, everybody with his own vision and opinion.'

(10) A: Asta e chiar ciudat.
B: **Yap, anyway**, las-o încolo. Tu ce mai faci? (CoPers)
'A: This is really weird.
B: **Yep, anyway**, let it go. How are you?'

(11) A: Ohh, păi putem după 5 că nici eu nu am timp.
B: mai e până atunci.
A: o să ne ia să corectăm **anyway**. (CoPers)

'A: Oh, well, we can [do it] after 5, because I don't have time either.
B: there is still time until then.
A: it will take [time] to check **anyway**.'

(12) A: cum nu mai cereți explicații?
B: aşa mă gândeam... că **oricum** au destule cerințe.
A: trebuie explicații tho. Nu sunt multe **anyway**. Veto :)) (CoPers)

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'A:You don't ask for explanations anymore?
B: I thought so ... because they have enough requirements **anyway**.
A: But explanations are needed. There aren't many **anyway**. Veto.'

(13) Cred că poate fi o sursă de venit fainã pentru cineva care face sau e interesat de traducere. Drăguță, mulțumesc mult **anyway**. (CoPers)

'I think it could be a nice source of income for someone who does or is interested in translations. Dear, thank you a lot **anyway**.'

(14) **Anyway**, ca să îți răspund la întrebare, am ales restaurantul [acela] pentru că am mers la o nuntă acolo şi ne-am simțit foarte bine. (RoTenTen16)
'**Anyway**, to answer your question, we chose that restaurant because we went there for a wedding and we had a nice time there.'

In contrast with its Romanian counterpart *oricum* (12b), which has more syntactic flexibility, appearing in initial, medial or final position, the English marker *anyway* is not so flexible. It preserves its features from the source language. According to Andersen's analytical framework for the study of pragmatic borrowing (Andersen 2014) we may claim that *anyway* shows syntactic stability in relation to the recipient language.

3.3. *Jesus!*

There are several Romanian discourse markers that derive from nouns denoting deities or invoking their protection: *Doamne!* ('God!'), *Doamne fereşte!* or *Doamne păzeşte!* ('God forbid/ protect!') which are used to emphasize that the speaker is surprised or shocked. The discourse markers *Isuse!*, *Isuse Cristoase!* (also written and pronounced 'Hristoase'), the Romanian counterparts for *Jesus!* and *Jesus Christ!*, have very few occurrences in internet corpora. This is because markers that have in their structure the name of 'Christ' are mostly known, according to Romanian cultural background, as swear words: *Hristosul/ Hristoşii mă-tii* (lit. 'your mother's Christ(s)'), just to give an example. We believe that the few occurrences of *Isuse!* and *Isuse Cristoase!*, are calques of their English correspondents which might have entered Romanian through literal translations.

(15) Hello, V.! Sper că ai terminat cu cele 2000 de pagini, **Jesus**, sună imens! (CoPers)
'Hello, V.! I hope you have finished those 2000 pages, **Jesus**, that sounds a lot!'

(16) A: Suntem în mijlocul unui conflict cu socrii şi nu ştiu cum să-i spun. Nu ştiu.
B: **Jesus**! Te pot ajuta cu vreo idee? (CoPers)
'A: We are in the middle of a conflict with our parents-in-law and I don't know how to tell her. I do not know.
B: **Jesus**! Can I help you with any ideas?'

(17) **Jesus Christ**! Păi eu cu banii ăia mănânc o săptămână la local, fraților. (roTenTen16)

'**Jesus Christ**! I eat a week at the restaurant with that money'

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3.4. *Oh, my God!*

Oh, my God! is maybe one the most used English discourse markers in Romanian alongside *ok*. Its high frequency in use contributed to several variations regarding the form especially in written conversations ((20)–(22)). In (20) the form *oumaigad* is written according to Romanian orthographic rules, probably to show its integration into a system of discourse strategies particular to the social group the speaker belongs to. It also highlights some group features, like nonconformism and openness to innovation and change, that allow such variations to take place. Whatever the reason, it is clear that the speaker's attitude plays a significant role when a form appears or disappears.

In example (18) the speaker uses quotation marks to indicate the lack of an adjective that would properly describe its emotional state. The discourse marker *oh, my God!* is transformed into an adjective, a strategy that is enhancing the speaker's enthusiasm related to what his/her interlocutor said. It is a hearer-oriented marker as it gives the interlocutor the necessary clues to better understand the speaker's position regarding the situation described. The abbreviated form *OMG* ((21)–(22)) became an acronym with variations in pronunciation: /ōem'jē/ preserving English phonetic norms, and /ɔːmg/ adapted to Romanian pronunciation. These variations show us a positive attitude of the speaker regarding the English item which might lead to final establishment of the marker into the language.

(18) Ce mă bucur pentru tine! ... sunt ceva de genul '**oh, my God, oh my God!**' de când am citit mesajul tău (CoPers)

'I am so glad for you! ... I am like '**oh, my God, oh my God!**' since I read your message.'

(19) Iar dacă ar şti cât de uşor îmi câştig banii … **ohh my god**! (CoRoLa)

'If they knew how easy it is for me to earn the money ... **oh my god.'**

(20) A: doar că la Nottingham nu vor document separat. Trebuie să completez nişte căsuțe.
B: **oumaigad**. Dă-mi-le mie dacă vrei.. (CoPers)

'It is just that at Nottingham they don't want a separate document. I have to fill in some textboxes.
B: **oh my god**. Give them to me if you want.'

(21) **OMG**! E expoziție Dali aici?? (CoPers)

'**OMG**! There is a Dali exhibition here??'

(22) A: Uite, femeia asta cunoştea 18 limbi. Crezi că o poți depăși?
B: **Omg** şi când le-a învățat? La ce vârstă? (CoPers)

'A: Look, this woman knew 18 languages. Do you think you can exceed her?'
B: **Omg**, when did she learn them? At what age?

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4. DISCUSSIONS

Analyzing German dialects spoken in the United States, Goss and Salmons (2000: 481) suggest that English markers first entered German speech as emblematic code-switches and eventually became established borrowings, which then replaced the native discourse markers. In order to better explain the process of language change occurred in German-American discourse marking, the authors differentiate among 4 phases of change: **phase 1.** exclusive use of German discourse markers; **phase 2.** code-switching, especially emblematic switching, introduces English markers into German; **phase 3.** both systems coexist, with English markers clearly borrowed, German modal particles begin to die out; **phase 4.** English markers are part of German grammar rather than code-switches; the native system is essentially dead and the substitution complete.

To synthesize, discourse markers enter a language through code-switching. They coexist for a while as pragmatic borrowings with local markers, gradually taking their place, and settling in language as loans in a later phase.

As for English discourse markers in Romanian conversation it is difficult to give a final verdict. In the examples analyzed above we noticed that English discourse markers preserved their internal features (i.e. the pragmatic functions) from the source language, while their external features tended to adapt syntactically, phonetically and orthographically to the recipient language. We suggested that English discourse markers make up a continuum of cases from code-switching to pragmatic borrowings, depending on their frequency in use and on the speaker's attitude towards the English word.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Discourse markers are susceptible to code-switching and pragmatic borrowings because they are peripheral, optional, multifunctional, oral, etc. The fact that code-switching at discourse markers and pragmatic borrowings in bilingual communities are very common suggests that discourse markers are perceived as a distinct and unified category. Code-switching might be explained in terms of a conversational strategy that aims at highlighting the boundaries of conversational units. Pragmatic borrowings involve the full transfer of pragmatic functions and features from the source language in the recipient language. The relationship between cases of code-switching and pragmatic borrowing is best seen as a continuum.

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