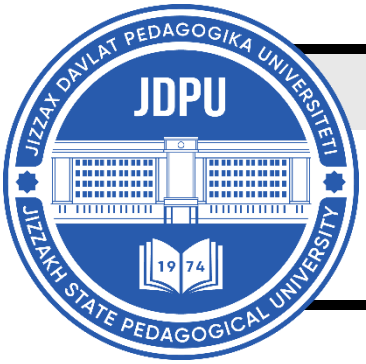
DOI: https://doi.org/10.37547/mesmj-V7-I1-34 Pages: 271-275

MENTAL ENLIGHTENMENT SCIENTIFIC – METHODOLOGICAL JOURNAL



MENTAL ENLIGHTENMENT SCIENTIFIC – METHODOLOGICAL JOURNAL

http://mentaljournal-jspu.uz/index.php/mesmj/index

FRENCH LOANWORDS IN ENGLISH MILITARY TERMINOLOGY: A HISTORICAL AND LEXICAL ANALYSIS

Muborak Khaitbayevna Nosirova
PhD student at Kokand State University
muborak.nosirova@list.ru
Kokand, Uzbekistan

ABOUT ARTICLE

Key words: loanwords; military term; English language; French language; cultural linguistics.

Received: 21.01.26
Accepted: 22.01.26
Published: 23.01.26

Abstract: This article examines the influence of military contacts and armed conflicts on French loanwords in the English language over the last millennium. Particular attention is given to French loanwords in military terminology, including names of armed forces branches, military formations, ranks, and slang expressions used by English-speaking servicemen. The paper also considers the role of loanwords in filling nominative gaps, the processes of semantic change and loss of original motivation in borrowed items, and the broader impact of French on English vocabulary.

Introduction. Loanwords are widely recognized as a crucial component of the lexicon of most languages. According to studies, about 75 % of English vocabulary is formed by loanwords from approximately fifty languages, acquired under varying historical conditions. This high proportion indicates that English has been shaped profoundly by contacts with other cultures, including in the domains of economic, social, scientific, and, importantly, military relations. Borrowing is defined there as a process through which elements of one language, primarily words or meaning-bearing phonemes, appear in another language as a result of interaction between different nations. Historically, war, armed conflicts, and military cooperation have created “ideal” or “propitious” conditions for such borrowing. For English, imperial expansion, globalization, migration, and cross-national commerce involving Great Britain and the United States have all contributed to extensive lexical enrichment via

loanwords. Among the donor languages, French has had a particularly significant impact on English, especially since the Norman conquest of 1066. It is said that along with Latin and German, French was one of the major sources of English vocabulary, with about 29 % of English words having a French root (Finkenstaedt & Wolff, 1973). The imposition of a French-speaking king and ruling elite in medieval England, followed by centuries of political and military interaction with France, left an "indelible mark" on English. This impact is particularly evident in military terminology, including the very word "army," and many names of formations, ranks, and operations. According to E. Sapir and Z. A. Haritonchik, who describe the historical background of French influence on English, with special reference to military events (Norman conquest, Hundred Years' War, World War I), systematically review French loanwords in English military terminology (branches, formations, ranks, and slang), and discuss the significance of these borrowings for linguistic theory, lexicology, and military translation.

The article draws on classical and modern linguistic scholarship to frame the notion of borrowing. E. Sapir (1993) is cited as emphasizing that loanwords are a result of interaction among nations in different spheres, including economic, military, social, and scientific relations. Loanwords are not merely isolated lexical items; they reflect broader patterns of contact, dominance, and cultural exchange.

Z. A. Haritonchik (1992) considers loanwords as a distinct category of vocabulary from the perspective of nomination and motivation. According to this view, borrowing is one of how a language solves problems of naming new phenomena. It allows speakers to use an existing lexical unit from another language to fill a nominative gap, thereby economizing linguistic effort in speech production.

However, this process also involves the loss of former associations and motivation that the word possessed in its source language. When a borrowed term is integrated into the recipient language, speakers may no longer have access to the original semantic connections, which creates difficulties in recognizing or reconstructing its meaning during speech perception. Haritonchik also notes that borrowing is governed by a kind of contradiction: in some contexts it is facilitated, in others it is resisted; languages can both permit and prohibit borrowings, depending on sociolinguistic and systemic factors.

Despite the apparent decline in the productivity of borrowing as a process in modern English, the percentage of borrowed vocabulary remains very high. Semantic derivation and other word-formation processes may currently be more active, but historically, borrowing has played a central role in shaping English vocabulary.

Regarding Finkenstaedt and Wolff (1973), who estimate that approximately 29 % of English words are of French origin. French influence is explained in terms that echo Gotlan's (2013) general observation that, during particular historical periods, the language of the country that dominates economically or culturally, or that becomes the locus of significant historical events, tends to exert the strongest impact on other languages.

In the context of English, several key historical episodes serve as milestones for French lexical influence: the Norman conquest, the subsequent centuries of French-speaking monarchy and nobility in England, the Hundred Years' War, and later military alliances such as that between France and the United States during World War I. These episodes created the conditions in which French loanwords, especially in military and related domains, entered and became entrenched in English.

Methodology. The methodology is thus descriptive and analytical, and can be summarized as follows: the primary material consists of the descriptions, examples, and classifications of French loanwords in English military vocabulary provided in the attached article. These include terminology for branches of the armed forces, names of military formations, military ranks, slang and colloquial expressions used by English-speaking servicemen, particularly in World War I. The article situates these loanwords within historical contexts of language contact, including military conflicts and cooperation, such as The Norman conquest (1066), The Hundred Years' War (1337–1453), and the Franco-American alliance in World War I.

Results. It is noted that French influence on English is rooted in specific historical events. The Norman conquest of England in 1066, led by William the Conqueror, brought a French-speaking king and a new French-speaking ruling elite to England. For roughly the next two centuries, the English royal family and their close associates were of French descent, often intermarried with French nobility and surrounded by French retainers and courtiers. This socio-political configuration institutionalized French as a prestige language in England. Subsequently, the Hundred Years' War, a series of conflicts between England and France lasting from 1337 to 1453, continued to foster intensive contact. Although the war itself was antagonistic, it nonetheless maintained a situation in which French remained a language of military and political importance, allowing further transfer of military terminology into English. In later centuries, World War I provided another crucial context. France served as an ally of the United States, and English-speaking soldiers (primarily Americans) cooperated closely with French forces on the Western Front. Under these conditions, borrowing was not limited to

formal military terms but extended to conversational vocabulary and slang, reflecting everyday interactions between soldiers.

Across these periods, the cumulative result was what the authors describe as an "indelible stamp" of French on English, particularly in the realm of military vocabulary. Several core French loanwords designate branches of the armed forces and key military activities, for example, army – armee (Old French), infantry – infanterie (Middle French), cavalry – cavalerie (Middle French) artillery – artillerie (Old French). In addition to branches of the military, various operational and tactical terms are also of French origin. For instance, reconnaissance – reconnaissance (Middle French), sortie – sortie (Middle French), siege – siege (Old French). These examples show that fundamental elements of English military vocabulary—names for whole branches of the armed forces and common tactical activities—are French loanwords, many of them dating from Old or Middle French stages. The vocabulary of military formations in English also contains many French-origin items, such as formation – formacion (Old French), squad – escouade (Middle French), platoon – plauton (Middle French), battalion – bataillon (Middle French), corps – corps (Old French). These terms cover a range of organizational levels, from smaller units (squad, platoon) to larger formations (battalion, brigade, corps). Their presence in English indicates that the structuring and naming of military units was strongly influenced by French models of organization and terminology.

A further key area of borrowing is the system of military ranks: corporal – caporal (Middle French), sergeant – sergeant (Old French), lieutenant – lieutenant (Middle French). These ranks cover much of the hierarchical structure of armies, from non-commissioned officers (corporal, sergeant) to senior commanders (colonel, general). The article highlights the gradual and historically layered nature of their borrowing. For instance, the rank "lieutenant colonel" was established in France in 1669 but did not enter English until the eighteenth century, showing a time lag between French institutional change and English lexical adoption.

The example of "castle" is also mentioned: its modern English meaning developed under the influence of the Old Norman language in the twelfth century, indicating that certain military-related architectural terms were shaped by Norman French in the medieval period. These examples demonstrate that borrowing in wartime is not restricted to technical terminology. Soldiers adapt, distort, and play with foreign words, integrating them into English slang with new connotations. They also show that borrowing can be driven by intensive everyday contact, humor, and the social dynamics of life at the front.

Discussion. Borrowing is a central mechanism in the development of English vocabulary, with approximately 75 % of English words being of foreign origin and around 29

% having French roots (Finkenstaedt & Wolff, 1973). Historical events such as the Norman conquest, the Hundred Years' War, and World War I created sustained conditions for language contact between English and French, especially in military contexts. Moreover, French loanwords are deeply embedded in English military terminology, covering branches of the armed forces, formations, ranks, and slang used by English-speaking servicemen. The process of borrowing responds to the need to name new phenomena (such as specific military units or operations) while also leading to a loss of original semantic motivation in the target language.

Conclusion. Military conflicts and cooperation are particularly "propitious" environments for lexical borrowing, producing both technical and informal vocabulary that reflects the realities of war, alliance, and intercultural contact.

Overall, French military loanwords represent a dynamic linguistic phenomenon that has played a leading role in shaping English military terminology and servicemen's slang over the last millennium. Studying these loanwords remains topical, not only for historical linguistics and lexicology but also for practical fields such as military translation and intercultural communication.

References:

1. Dickson, P. War Slang. — USA: Pocket Books Publishing, 1994.
2. Finkenstaedt, T.; Wolff, D. Ordered Profusion: Studies in Dictionaries and the English Lexicon. — Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1973.
3. Gotlan, Yu. A. French loanwords in the German language with the meaning "clean". — Language and Culture, 2013, №4 (24), pp. 5–13.
4. Haritonchik, Z. A. Lexicology of the English Language. — Minsk: Vyisshaya shkola, 1992.
5. Online Etymology Dictionary. "Castle" maqolasi. — Elektron manba: http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=castle
6. Sapir, E. Selected Works in Linguistics and Cultural Studies. — Moscow: Progress, 1993.
7. Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales (CNRTL). "Lieutenant-colonel", http://www.cnrtl.fr/etymologie/lieutenant-colonel.