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Yaron Matras

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Languages in contact in a world marked by change and mobility

Yaron Matras, University of Manchester

The purpose of this short editorial essay is to point out some of the challenges now facing research into contact linguistics. I will begin by taking stock, very briefly, of some of the key developments in the field over the past few decades. At the risk of some simplification, we can divide existing specialisations in contact linguistics into the following areas: the study of bilingual language acquisition and bilingual language processing, the study of conversational codeswitching, the study of contact-induced language change, the study of contact languages (pidgins, creoles and mixed languages), the study of the areal spread of structural features across language boundaries (areal linguistics), and the sociolinguistics of multilingual speech communities and language planning in multilingual settings. Only the latter area might be viewed as primarily a practical or applied field, while the former are mainly theoretical. Yet I will argue that the reality of global mobility, networking and communication opportunities, the blurring of distinctions between written and oral styles, as well as regionalisation trends impact not just on the practicalities of understanding and catering to multilingualism at the societal and individual levels, but also on our theoretical appreciation of contact phenomena. Traditional models have tended to define languages as static systems as well as coherent emblems that help rally loyalty. By contrast, contemporary research into language use, and changes in language practices, now place us in a much more confident position to assert the dynamism of linguistic repertoires as adjustable and adaptable instruments of communication. As such, they are the property of individuals and the social networks that they form, rather than of institutions or states. Users are making ever more use of opportunities to manage their own multilingual repertoires in a manner that is de-coupled from debates about loyalty, control, and power. For our theoretical understanding of language contact, a thorough review of our notions of 'systems' and 'constraints' is called for.

The view of multilingualism as cumulative monolingualism has a long tradition within descriptive linguistics. Early debates surrounding child bilingualism were pre-occupied with the age at which bilingual infants are able to distinguish between their linguistic systems, a question that dominated the discussion for a considerable period of time after it was launched in the late 1970's by Volterra & Teaschner (1978) - see also Redlinger & Park (1980), Vihman (1985) and many more. Practice-oriented attempts to describe the process of second language acquisition had viewed it as a sequence of events on the learner's path toward the ultimate goal of acquiring native-like competence in navigating the rules of the target language (see Klein 1986). Intrigued by the fact that bilinguals suffering from language impairment may show differentiated loss or recovery patterns for their individual languages, researchers in psycholinguistics had until recently hypothesised about differentiated storage or accessibility of languages in the brain (e.g. Albert & Obler 1978).

The early study of codeswitching was concerned with identifying structural constraints on points of switching as well as structural and situational triggers for switches (Pfaff 1979; Bentahila & Davies 1983; Berk-Seligson 1986; Clyne 1987). The discussion led to the postulation of universal generalisations on codeswitching behaviour (Poplack, Sankoff & Miller 1988; Muysken 2000), and even to an attempt to use codeswitching data for a formal model that aims to predict language contact phenomena in general, relating them to strata in the speech production apparatus (Myers-Scotton 1993, 2002; Myers-Scotton & Jake 2000). Alongside the structural discussion, researchers have been attempting to illuminate the motivations behind speakers' choices of codes and the effects of code contrast on sequentiality (Gumperz 1980; Auer 1984; Backus 1996; Li Wei 2005).

Models of contact-induced language change have taken the position that languages are self-contained systems that influence one another either as a result of the greater social prestige that one language enjoys over another, or else in an attempt by speakers to fill so-called 'gaps' in the lexical and grammatical representation of the recipient language, by extending it to cover functions that are present in the donor language (for an overview of hypotheses, see Heath (1984), Thomason (2001), Winford (2003), Matras (2009)). Interest in contact-induced language change received its most significant boost since Weinreich's (1953) pioneer work with the appearance of Thomason & Kaufman's (1988) discussion of contact in historical linguistic perspective. Their attempt to link the borrowability of structural categories on a scale with the sociolinguistic and cultural dimension of contact is often regarded as going beyond Moravcsik's (1978) postulation of typological hierarchies of borrowing. Subsequent discussions have tended to focus on individual cases of language pairs (Field 2002; Aikhenvald 2002) or individual categories such as discourse markers (Salmons 1990; Maschler 1994; Matras 1998; Fuller 2001) or verbs (Wohlgemuth 2009).

Alongside these, almost 'ordinary' processes of contact-induced change, contact linguistics embraced the exciting phenomenon of the birth of a language in a contact situation. A view was adopted according to which pidgins and creoles are outcomes of 'broken language transmission' (Thomason & Kaufman 1988) and that they offer themselves to a standardised analysis in terms of a lexifier language along with further contributing components that are rooted in a multilingual reality but less easily identified empirically (cf. Arends & *al.* 1995; Holm 2000). Mixed Languages or Bilingual Mixtures, on the other hand, were argued to be the outcome of a separate, though equally predictable process termed 'language intertwining' (Bakker 1997), through which the grammar of one parent language combined with the lexicon of another. As a further 'extraordinary' product of contact, linguistic areas (earlier labelled 'Sprachbünde' or 'convergent zones' and identified as counter-examples to the notion that language change proceeded exclusively through branching and divergence) were argued to constitute special cases where collective bilingualism had a radical impact on the direction of structural change (Emeneau 1956; Thomason 2001).

Early sociolinguistic research into bilingualism focused on how extra-linguistic factors such as context and setting could trigger predictable choices of language (Fishman 1965). Many academics and practitioners have consequently considered top-down intervention in order to shape the domain distribution of languages to be the key toward ensuring linguistic equality and the maintenance of heritage language. Key policy concepts that emerged in the research discussion included the 'territoriality principle' (Nelde 1993) evoked to protect smaller languages within recognised boundaries, and the notion of linguistic human rights (Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson 1995) as the duty of state institutions to safeguard the use of languages in a variety of domains.

Globalisation is gradually leading to a shift in the balance of powers and responsibilities between national governments, and trans-national as well as regionally based forms of

governance. Both create windows of opportunity for smaller languages, which are no longer dependent on a complex, ideological negotiation of roles and powers within a national system. A further feature of globalisation is greater mobility and increased transposition of identity to the level of cross-region networking – in Appadurai's (1992) words, the 'de-territorialisation' of identity. Trans-national and super-regional networking is facilitated through communication technology. Our world now is thus very different from the one in which Fishman (1964) predicted the step-by-step retreat of ethnic languages in urban immigrant communities. Today's linguistic diasporas are able to support one another not just through physical contact, facilitated by more frequent mobility, but also through the exchange of media – films, websites, and satellite broadcasting. Immigrants speaking their ethnic language are no longer isolated, and are no longer necessarily pressured by a choice between languages.

Closely associated with the increasing reliance on communication technology is users' flexibility in communication, and the blurring of distinctions between oral and written mediums. Text messaging and chatrooms provide real-time, almost face-to-face interaction opportunities via a written medium, while emails and blogs are private documents with a wide dissemination potential. Such media allow and even encourage the use of non-standard forms of written language and often of linguistic creativity and improvisation. We are thus in an age in which the link between identity and ideology is weakening, and multiple identities are more and more acceptable; an age in which responsibilities for culture and communication are devolved and no longer centralised; in which mobility and communication technology facilitate language maintenance and communicative creativity; in which speakers and users of language are accustomed to exploring new channels of communication and to sharing the responsibility for shaping key aspects of their communicative vehicles through mutual accommodation; and it is an age in which linguistic theory emphasises the pluralistic and dynamic nature of multilingualism itself as the creative use, by individuals, of a broad repertoire of communicative structures. In this age, we can rely on users' creativity and aptitude and call for a transfer of ownership over language and language management from state institutions to user communities. This means in practice de-regulation of language use, de-coupling of language support measures from constitutional issues, and flexible responsiveness to community needs and initiatives.

New approaches to language contact and bilingualism have begun to challenge the view of multilingualism as the cumulative addition of static, self-contained linguistic systems. Instead, they tend to view multilingualism as an individual speaker's dynamic, goal-oriented and creative use of a complex repertoire of linguistic structures. Multilingualism is thus an individual's diverse and differentiated network of communicative choices made during interaction with other individuals. How can we define a multilingual person's choices of linguistic structures at the level of both the utterance and the conversation setting and context, in terms of functional activation of components of an overall linguistic repertoire? How do individuals within a community negotiate the roles and representation (in speech modes and writing) of sets of structures within their shared linguistic repertoires? These are some of the questions that have been associated with what Blommaert (2010) has termed the 'Sociolinguistics of globalisation'.

Against this background, contact linguistics has been experiencing a shift in some of its analytical paradigms through a combination of new empirical research, the infiltration of new theoretical models and growing interface with discussions in cultural theory and other academic disciplines. The results can be detected in almost all the aforementioned domains of study. In the study of bilingual language acquisition among infants, for instance, Lanza's (1997) research has shown that the ability to separate languages is a direct response on the

part of the child to the consistency of context-bound language use within the parental model; multilingualism is thus a form of social behaviour that is acquired in interaction with behavioural role models. Similarly, we are beginning to understand second-language acquisition as a process by which learners acquire communicative skills, in the first instance, whether or not they conform to the native-language target model (see Goglia 2006). We now also accept that not all environments trigger consistent use of either one language or another, and that monolingualism is not at all the prevalent norm in any given conversational context; rather, bilinguals will find themselves interacting in a continuum of contexts, many of which are likely to trigger what Grosjean (2001) has described as the ‘bilingual mode’, where language mixing is itself the default choice. Psycholinguistic models of bilingual language processing are gradually developing a consensus according to which bilinguals have their full set of linguistic structures available to them at all times. The selection of individual lexical items and constructions proceeds, following this view, in much the same way as the selection of stylistic variants in a monolingual repertoire – namely by reviewing context appropriateness, and inhibiting inappropriate choices (cf. Paradis 2004).

A new view of contact-induced language change regards innovations not as ‘gaps’ or as mere accommodation to social pressure, but as an attempt by speakers to make optimal use of the full range of expressive structures within the linguistic repertoire that is at their disposal and regards individual speakers’ creativity in discourse as a major trigger for long-term language change (Matras 2007, 2009; Matras & Sakel 2007). Structural borrowing is regarded in this connection as a fusion or bridging of repertoire components (Matras 2009). In cross-linguistic perspective, uniform templates for the description of structural borrowing allow us more comprehensive insights into the contact behaviour of individual functional categories, both grammatical and lexical (cf. Matras & Sakel 2007a; Haspelmath & Tadmor 2009). Of particular interest in recent discussions are the conditions under which hard-to-borrow structures, most notably bound and inflectional morphology, are in fact replicated from one language to another, thereby seemingly defying proposed constraints (Vanhove & *al.* 2012; Amiridze & *al.* 2013).

The role of individual users’ creative use of repertoires has entered centre stage in the study of contact languages, too. McWhorter’s (2005) suggestion that creoles emerge through exploitation of the linguistic resources available to speakers has led the discussion away from the rigid template of lexifier language combined with either substrate influence or universals of structural simplification or acquisition of grammar, and towards a more open framework that calls for a case by case investigation of users’ (historical) repertoires. Speakers have been shown to consciously manipulate structural choices within their bilingual linguistic repertoire, leading to the emergence of stable Mixed Languages (Matras & Bakker 2003; Bakker & Matras 2013). In some instances the deliberate construction of a mixed language is viewed the speaker community’s own informal, non-institutionalised answer to language death, ensuring that an old community language that is in the process of being abandoned altogether maintains some form of an afterlife, and investigations have focused on the way users with a mixed or complex language heritage tailor clusters of structures to match individual and family-based styles (McConvell & Meakins 2005; O’Shannessy 2005; Meakins 2011; Matras 2010). In areal linguistics, the impression that particular regions stand out as convergent zones or linguistic ‘leagues’ (Sprachbünde) is giving way to a realisation that cross-linguistic spreadzones are the norm rather than the exception, and that it is their dense clustering rather than their seemingly extraordinary nature that draws our attention and merits exploration (Masica 2001; Campbell 2005; Matras 2011). In this connection, the discussion has been concerned with the way in which theoretical models of language change, such as notions of grammaticalisation, are helpful in explaining language convergence (Heine & Kuteva 2005; Matras & Sakel 2007b; Wiemer & *al.* 2012).

Overall, we see an approach to contact linguistics that regards languages less as static systems, and more as dynamic repertoires, and speakers not just as followers of social norms, but as creative contributors to the shape of linguistic structures and routines.

In this context, I take a particular interest on the following questions: What resources do community have at their disposal to maintain heritage languages without relying a top-down support from governments? How do individuals' views of 'identity' and the networking opportunities that they have today motivate and facilitate the maintenance of complex (multilingual) repertoires? To what extent do new attitudes that favour multi-faceted identities and network membership facilitate new forms of cross-linguistic fusion or convergence, and might these lead to new forms of contact-induced language change? In what respect does contact-induced structural change remained constrained, and what role does the functionality of categories play in constraining or facilitating change? In particular, how can contact linguistics serve our general understanding of the language faculty, its architecture and possibly its evolution, by helping us identify the layered structure of the grammatical apparatus, where some categories, such as intonation and discourse particles, appears highly prone to contact (and thus implicitly prone toward escaping the speaker's control when selecting forms from the 'correct' language), while others, such as deictic and anaphoric elements and finite verb inflection (the abstract map of the discourse knowledge, and the anchoring of the predication and so of the proposition, respectively) appear resistant to contact?

A world in which global mobility is the norm seems to offer us new empirical opportunities as well as new conceptual tools with which to tackle these and other questions.

Yaron Matras
University of Manchester / School of Arts, Languages & Cultures
Manchester M13 9PL, UK
<yaron.matras@manchester.ac.uk>

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