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Language Contact

New perspectives

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Volume 28

Language Contact. New perspectives
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Acknowledgements

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Introduction

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The year 2008 marked the 20th anniversary of Thomason & Kaufman's *Language Contact, Creolization, and Genetic Linguistics*. This work, a convincing combination of a theoretical framework and detailed case studies, has given a tremendous boost to the study of language contact phenomena, and it still stands as the most influential work in the field since the publication of Weinreich's (1953) foundational *Languages in Contact*.

In the years following the publication of Thomason & Kaufman's book, parallel political and technical developments – the end of the Cold War and the internet revolution – gave an additional impetus to language contact research in many respects: an increasing number of languages and data became (electronically) accessible, the mobility of people grew, and new contact situations came into being. Indeed, even "new" languages arose (e.g. Croatian and Serbian, where the Slavists of one generation earlier would have spoken of Serbo-Croat). Today no-one seriously doubts the impact language contact had on (probably) any of the world's languages. Opinions only differ with respect to the scope and intensity of it.

Research into language contact can be roughly divided into three main branches. The first is the traditional in-depth investigation of a certain contact situation, usually involving no more than two languages. This has been one of the goals of historical comparative linguistics from its very beginning and will remain important in the near future, too, as the field is still far from being completely explored. Countless parts of the world and contact situations remain to be examined. Even long-standing and well-known contacts had not been investigated exhaustively until recently (e.g. Sarhimaa 1999 on Russian-Karelian contact, De Smit 2006 on Finnish-Swedish contact, Braunmüller & Diercks 1993 and Braunmüller 1995 on Low German-Scandinavian contact in the Late Middle Ages, or Silva-Corvalán 1994 on language contact between Spanish and English in Los Angeles). A second group of scholars has been focusing on cross-linguistic comparisons and the identification of larger linguistic areas (cf. e.g. Heine & Kuteva 2005, Heine & Kuteva 2006, but already Décsy 1973). A third major topic has been the negative effects of intensive contact, with language or dialect death as a possible result (cf. e.g. Nettle & Romaine 2000, Janse & Tol 2003).

The papers in this volume are concerned with different levels and different aspects of language contact in a wide variety of languages and language families, including Indo-European (Germanic, Romance, and Slavic), Finno-Ugric, Turkic, and Japanese.

Pieter **Muysken's** paper is a theoretical contribution to ethnolect research. Muysken discusses two different views on ethnolects: the "shift perspective" and the "multidimensional perspective". In the current literature, the shift perspective has attracted most attention; within this perspective, focus is on the approximation of the ethnic group towards the national language and allows comparisons between ethnic varieties and standard varieties of the dominant language in a speech community. In the multidimensional perspective, however, the original languages of the ethnic group as well as processes of mutual convergence and simplification play an additional role in the new varieties. Moreover, this perspective allows us to contextualize the varieties within an overall account of the multilingual repertoires of speakers of a non-dominant language and of the strategies that they employ to make use of this repertoire.

The next paper is a case study in shifts effects in ethnolects. In this paper, John **Nerbonne**, Timo **Lauttamus**, Lisa Lena **Opas-Hänninen**, and Wybo **Wiersma** explore techniques to automatically tag corpora and to detect syntactic differences between first generation and second generation Finnish immigrants in Australia. On the basis of a corpus of interviews comprising some 305,000 tokens, they found that first generation speakers were significantly more prone to 'syntactic contamination' from Finnish. The authors were also able to identify specific syntactic phenomena in the speech of first generation speakers, such as omission of progressive auxiliary 'be', existential 'there', and anaphoric 'it'. They conclude that some of the features found in the data can certainly be explained as contact-induced changes, whereas others may be ascribed to universally determined properties of the language faculty.

Where Muysken's and Nerbonne et al's papers are concerned with varieties of the national language spoken by ethnic groups, the subsequent three papers discuss the reverse: changes in immigrant languages resulting from contact with the dominant national language. In the first of these, Ricardo **Otheguy**, Ana Celia **Zentella** and David **Livert** consider a number of grammatical factors that can be held responsible for attested variation in the usage of subject pronouns by Spanish-speaking immigrants in New York City. The authors conclude that the increase in subject pronoun rates in the immigrants in NYC is due to their adapting their usage of Spanish pronouns to that of the equivalent pronouns in English. This observation is corroborated by various factors, such as a correlation with the number of years that they have lived in NYC, their age of arrival, their English skills, and different settings in which the languages are used.

Piibi-Kai **Kivik's** paper likewise deals with pronoun variation in an immigrant language in the United States, viz. Estonian. Kivik's study contrasts the use of personal pronouns in Estonian spoken by first-generation immigrants or long-term sojourners in the United States, and the use of pronouns by monolingual speakers in Estonia. She found that the pronoun use in varieties influenced by English differs from that of monolinguals living in Estonia. For example, bilingual Estonian-English speakers make less use of zero subjects, which are a feature of standard Estonian but not of English, and can therefore clearly be classified as contact-induced change.

The third and final paper on changes in immigrant languages is the contribution by A. Seza **Doğruöz** and Ad **Backus**. Their purpose is to investigate whether there exist unconventional constructions in the Turkish spoken by Turkish immigrants in the Netherlands, and if so, if these could be attributed to Dutch influence. At a superficial glance, both questions can be answered positively, but the authors found that the observed unconventional constructions also existed in standard Turkish. This may be taken as proof that language change in situations of language contact accelerates incipient changes that already existed in the standard language (Silva-Corvalán 1986: 588, 604).

A historical perspective on the effects of language contact resulting from immigration is provided in a paper by Charlotte **Gooskens**, Renée **van Bezooijen** and Sebastian **Kürschner.** This paper is concerned with loan words in the national language from a culturally dominant immigrant language. The authors present a corpus-based survey of the percentage of loan-words in Dutch and Swedish, arguing that the differences between Dutch and Swedish can be explained both by linguistic distance and type of contact situation. Drawing data from the *Europarl* corpus of speeches held in the European Parliament and their translations, from which they extracted the most frequent 15,000 words for both languages, they show that the percentage of loans is significantly higher in Swedish (44.4%) than in Dutch (27.9%). One particularly striking difference regards the percentage of Low German loans, which is much higher in Swedish, even though both Swedish and Dutch had profound contacts with Low German speaking merchants in the Hanseatic period. This is due, the authors argue, to the fact that Dutch and Low German belong to one dialect continuum, which makes it very difficult to distinguish between native Dutch words and Low German loans. Gooskens et al's findings are in accordance with previous (small-scale) studies in the impact of foreign languages on the Swedish and Dutch lexicons.

Needless to say, immigration is not the only situation which may give rise to contact-induced change – border areas form another domain where contact effects are to be expected. Two of the papers in this volume deal with language contact in such areas. The first, by Hélène **Brijnen**, analyses the use of *gor*, a particle

borrowed from German (*gar*), in the Eastern Sorbian border dialect. Among other things she found that the Upper Sorbian dialects with strong Lower Sorbian influence show a more frequent use of *gor* than those without Lower Sorbian influence. According to the author the usage of *gor* is constrained by the phonological system of the recipient dialect – *gor* is more frequent in varieties which possess the consonant [g] than in varieties which lack this consonant.

Wilbert **Heeringa**, John **Nerbonne** and Petya **Osenova's** paper is a computational linguistic approach to border area contacts, exploring techniques that can be used to measure the effects of language contact. For this purpose they compared a selection of Bulgarian dialects to the five neighbouring languages Macedonian, Serbian, Romanian, Greek and Turkish, hypothesizing that dialects in the vicinity of one of these languages are phonologically more similar to these languages than dialects spoken further away. In order to operationalize the notion of "phonologically similar", the authors applied three different techniques: "Levenshtein distances", which aligns corresponding segments of pairs of (preferably cognate) words and sums the differences between these segments; the "phone frequency method", which compares two languages or language varieties by counting the number of tokens of each phoneme in comparable corpora; and the "feature frequency method", which counts the number of tokens of segments with specific values for given phonological features. All three techniques detected positive correlations between geographic and phonological distances in the case of Macedonian, Serbian and Romanian, which is a remarkable result in the light of the traditional assumption that phonology is only marginally affected in Balkan *Sprachbund* contacts. Another surprising effect was that the computational analysis showed negative correlations for Greek and Turkish, which the authors tentatively assume to be the consequence of historical and /or sociolinguistic factors. They finally found that the three techniques do not always correlate well with each other, which provides an important direction for future research.

Finally, languages may change without physical contact with speakers of another language. English is an obvious example of a language affecting other languages without direct contacts between speakers. Jason **Shaw** and Rahul **Balusu**'s paper concerns the introduction of the phonological contrast between /t/ and /tʃ/ before high front vowels in present-day Japanese. Data were gathered by means of an oral elicitation test in which two generations of Japanese native speakers, with little or no conversational proficiency in English, participated. The results of the test show that the older generation produce a weak contrast between /ti/ and /tʃi/ in some loans, by mapping these sequences to prosodically conditioned allophones of native /ti/. This contrast was subsequently enhanced by the

younger generation. Since most of the English loans date from after 1975, the older generation must have acquired this contrast during adulthood, suggesting that phonological change is possible even after the "critical period" of language acquisition. The authors furthermore show that the borrowing of phonological contrasts is constrained by existent allophonic variation in the target language.

Translators play an obvious role in long-distance language contact. In the final contribution to this volume, Nicola **Borrelli** investigates to what extent the translations of Brussels' official documents mirror the specific national perspectives of their translators, showing that they cannot escape the influence of the public opinion of their home countries.

The papers presented in this volume show a great variety in sources and methods, but they all contribute to our knowledge and understanding of language contact in times of globalization, while at the same time offering suggestions for further research.

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Ethnolects as a multidimensional phenomenon

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This paper contrasts two different views of the phenomenon of ethnolect, ethnic varieties of a language: the *shift* perspective and the *multidimensional* perspective. In the shift perspective, the focus is on the approximation in the speech of ethnic groups to the dominant national target language, while in the multidimensional perspective the original languages of the ethnic group and processes of mutual convergence and simplification play an additional role. The multidimensional perspective allows us to contextualize the varieties that have emerged in the process of shift within an overall account of multilingual repertoires of speakers of a non-dominant language. The complexity of the verbal repertoire and the alternating reliance on strategies of maintenance and shift, convergence, mixing, and simplification create the ethnolectal varieties.

1. Introduction[1]

Migrations of large groups of speakers to another country, or to metropolitan regions in their own country where a different language is dominant, have produced notable changes in the language behavior of these speakers. Similarly, smaller ethnic groups in a country where a language different from their own is dominant are under increasing pressure to adapt to this dominant language, under the aegis of national integration. Migration and national integration, two facets of the phenomenon of globalization, have conjointly led to the emergence of ethnic varieties: ethnolects.

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1. The research reported on here is part of a group project *Roots of Ethnolects* funded by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific research NWO with the participation of Hanke van Buren, Frans Hinskens, Ariën van Wijngaarden, and myself. In an early stage the project also involved Esther Krieken and Wouter Kusters. The perspectives taken here do not necessarily reflect the views of my colleagues in the project.

This paper contrasts two different views of the phenomenon of ethnolect, views which may be labeled the *shift* perspective and the *multidimensional* perspective. In the shift perspective, the focus is on the approximation in the speech of ethnic groups to the dominant national target language, while in the multidimensional perspective the original languages of the ethnic group as well as processes of mutual convergence and simplification play an additional role. The shift perspective is dominant in the current literature, but the complementary multidimensional perspective is also an important one, and keeps creeping up. In other words, we can speak of a specific variety (the shift perspective) versus the community repertoire (the multidimensional perspective).

The study of ethnolects has much more than a purely academic interest since it is heavily loaded in terms of the notions of national identity, language purity, and language diversity. To take the example of Dutch in the Netherlands (but the same goes for many other languages of industrial nations): there is a serious concern about the level of the proficiency in Dutch in e.g. school populations, not just among students of an immigrant background. Some people think that the level of control of Dutch should be the object of concern and intervention; this is a view shared by teachers and policy makers alike. The limited knowledge of Dutch, it is often the implicit message of popular discourse, would spread from young people from immigrant families to those from established family backgrounds. In this perspective, ethnolects are often equated with language decay. The continued use of the original languages of minority groups, migrant or historically rooted in the country, adds to these concerns.

I do not really know whether we can speak of decay of the national languages in the schools. Personally, I think that today's students have different skills – at least in part – from those of twenty years ago, which makes comparisons difficult. Intriguing is the possibility that the nature of a language such as Dutch is changing under the influence of migrant populations acquiring it as a second language, as in the shift perspective. When comparing native and non-native students we also need to take account of social class. I.e. the majority of non-native students are working class and concerns about linguistic skills in this social group have been voiced long ago, cf. Bernstein's work on the restricted code (1966).

2. The shift perspective

All over the world ethnic varieties of larger national languages are emerging, and of course have emerged for many centuries, as the result of second language acquisition after migration or integration into a larger political entity. When large groups of people thus acquire a second language, often in a process of language

shift, the language is subtly transformed and the result is then called an ethnolectal variety. For this reason, research on these shift ethnolects has become an increasingly important area within language contact studies. The process of group shift has occurred both in migration settings and in contexts where a resident minority population has shifted to a dominant national language. Since both migration and integration into larger national units, have triggered counter-reactions in terms of the reaffirmation of ethnic and regional identities, group language shift is an increasingly important area of study. The study of ethnolects in the shift perspective is thus concerned with the more or less stable outcomes of this process of group shift, particularly in urban settings (Wölck 1984).[2]

In the corresponding definition, an ethnolect is "the variety of a language that results when speakers of different ethnolinguistic backgrounds attempt to speak the dominant language (e.g. 'Chicano English')" (Danesi 1985:118). In Danesi's conception, ethnolects are thus products of language shift in the sense of Thomason & Kaufman (1988).

In a similar vein, Androutsopoulos (2001:2) defines an ethnolect as "a variety of the majority language (or 'host language') which is used and regarded as a vernacular for speakers of a particular ethnic descent and is marked by certain contact phenomena".

3. The multidimensional perspective

According to some researchers, however, ethnolects are not strictly to be equated with learners' varieties. In some communities, we find maintenance of a minority language. In communities where immigration took place a long time ago, such as the ethnic Italians or Polish in North America, most speakers are proficient in the standard variety. In the case of these speakers the resulting ethnolect is not a matter of not being able to, but rather of (under certain conditions) not wanting

2. The project *Roots of Ethnolects* is primarily focused on the shift perspective on ethnolects. We record young people in two cities, Amsterdam and Nijmegen, to determine the influence of the regional pronunciation on the ethnolect. Indeed Moroccan young people sound very different in both cities. Amsterdam and Nijmegen non-standard Dutch play a role, but also the own group languages of the young people, in our case Berber and Turkish. Furthermore we compare 11 and 19 year olds to establish the role of further language development, and we record paired conversations of young people in little groups with different partners (Moroccan, Dutch, Turkish) to determine the role of the background of the conversational partner, and whether the ethnolects influence the language use of young people of other ethnic backgrounds. Finally we hope to gain insight into the longer term effects on the Dutch language in an urban context of the presence of young people with so many different backgrounds.