DONALD WINFORD

AN INTRODUCTION TO CONTACT LINGUISTICS

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An Introduction to Contact Linguistics

Donald Winford

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For my students, past, present, and to come

Series Editor's Preface

Contact between human beings from different ethnic and other groups is obviously a social phenomenon; but it nearly always involves a linguistic dimension as well. A number of books in our Language in Society series have dealt with particular aspects of contact between speakers from different language backgrounds, such as intercultural communication. Others have been concerned with some of the outcomes of this type of contact, such as (undeniably) new-dialect formation, bilingualism, and pidgin and creole languages, as well as (more controversially) African American Vernacular English. This book, however, is the first we have published which deals with the phenomenon as a whole. We are therefore very fortunate that the author is one of the world's leading authorities in this area – not only someone who comes, personally, from a background of very interesting linguistic complexity, but also a scholar who has been at the forefront of descriptive and theoretical language contact research for the last three decades. *An Introduction to Contact Linguistics* represents the very latest scholarship on issues which will be of profound concern to all linguists working on language contact, including not only the topics I have just mentioned, but also very many others, including language shift, language death, language mixing, and second language acquisition. The book is exciting because of its innovative thinking, but it is also enormously erudite, and comprehensive in its coverage of all the major theories and issues in the field.

Peter Trudgill

Acknowledgments

The writing of this book has been a highly rewarding experience that added much to my knowledge of contact phenomena in general and of the creoles that are the main focus of my research. Contributing to this personal enrichment was the generous and enthusiastic support provided to me by many colleagues, friends, and students. Several of them shared their extensive knowledge in their own areas of specialization and made me rethink many of the entrenched ideas and assumptions I had not previously questioned.

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Contents

Series Editor's Preface xv
Acknowledgments xvi

1 Introduction: The Field of Contact Linguistics 1

1.1 The Subject Matter of Contact Linguistics 1
1.2 History of Research on Language Contact 6
1.3 The Field of Contact Linguistics 9
1.4 Types of Contact Situation 11
1.4.1 Language maintenance 11
1.4.2 Language shift 15
1.4.3 Language creation: new contact languages 18
1.5 Overview of Contact Situations and their Outcomes 22
1.6 The Social Contexts of Language Contact 24
1.6.1 Language contact in its social settings 25

2 Language Maintenance and Lexical Borrowing 29

2.1 Introduction 29
2.2 "Casual" Contact and Lexical Borrowing 30
2.2.1 English influence on the Japanese lexicon 31
2.3 Contact in Settings Involving "Unequal" Bilingualism 33
2.3.1 French influence on the lexicon of Middle English 34
2.3.2 Chinese influence on the Japanese lexicon 36
2.4 Lexical Borrowing in Equal Bilingual Situations 37
2.5 Social Motivations for Lexical Borrowing 37
2.6 The Processes and Products of Lexical Borrowing 42
2.7 The Integration of Loanwords 46
2.7.1 Phonological integration of loanwords 46
2.7.2 Morphological integration of loanwords 48

2.8 Linguistic Constraints on Lexical Borrowing 51
2.9 Structural Consequences of Lexical Borrowing 53
2.9.1 Impact of lexical borrowing on phonology 54
2.9.2 Impact of lexical borrowing on morphology 56
2.9.3 Impact of lexical borrowing on the lexicon 58
2.10 Summary 59

3 Structural Diffusion in Situations of Language Maintenance 61

3.1 Introduction 61
3.2 Is there Direct Borrowing of Structural Features? 63
3.3 Factors Affecting Structural Convergence 64
3.4 Structural Convergence in Stable Bilingual Situations 65
3.4.1 Spanish in LA 66
3.4.2 A situation of unstable bilingualism: French/English contact on Prince Edward Island 68
3.5 Sprachbünde: Contact Across Contiguous Speech Communities 70
3.5.1 The Balkan Sprachbund 71
3.6 A Case of Intimate Inter-Community Contact: Arnhem Land 74
3.6.1 Ritharngu and Ngandi 76
3.6.2 Nunggubuyu and Warndarang 78
3.6.3 Factors regulating convergence in Arnhem Land 78
3.7 Heavy to Extreme Structural Diffusion: Borrowing or Substratum Influence? 79
3.7.1 Old Norse influence on Old English 80
3.7.2 Situations in level 5 of Thomason and Kaufman's borrowing scale 83
3.7.3 Convergence in Kupwar 84
3.7.4 Convergence in Northwest New Britain 86
3.8 The Social Contexts of Structural Convergence 90
3.9 Linguistic Constraints on Structural Diffusion into a Maintained Language 91
3.9.1 Constraints on borrowing of morphology 91
3.9.2 Constraints based on congruence 93
3.9.3 Constraints based on transparency/markedness 94
3.9.4 Functionally based constraints 96
3.10 Constraints on Syntactic Diffusion 97
3.11 Summary 99

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4 Code Switching: Social Contexts 101

4.1 Introduction 101
4.2 Defining Code Switching 102
4.2.1 Code switching versus borrowing 107
4.2.2 Code switching versus "interference" 108
4.3 Social Motivations for Code Switching 110
4.3.1 Code switching and sociolinguistic domains 110
4.3.2 Micro-level analysis: code switching and conversation 114
4.3.3 Toward a theory of the social meaning of conversational code switching 117
4.3.4 Code switching and Communication Accommodation Theory 119
4.4 Summary 124

5 Code Switching: Linguistic Aspects 126

5.1 Introduction 126
5.2 Structural Constraints on Code Switching 126
5.2.1 Equivalence-based constraints 127
5.2.2 Government-based approaches to code switching 134
5.3 A Production-Based Model of Code Switching 137
5.3.1 Hypotheses of the MLF model 139
5.3.2 Establishing the matrix language 141
5.4 Constraints on Code Switching Within the MLF model 146
5.4.1 Constraints on switching of system morphemes 146
5.4.2 Constraints on switching of content morphemes 152
5.5 Constraints on Multi-Word Switches (EL Islands) 154
5.5.1 The EL Island Trigger Hypothesis 155
5.5.2 EL islands and the notion of congruence 158
5.6 Further Issues 163
5.7 Summary 165

6 Bilingual Mixed Languages 168

6.1 Introduction 168
6.2 Definition and Classification 170
6.3 Media Lengua 175
6.3.1 Structural characteristics 176
6.3.2 Adaptation of Spanish items to Quechua structure 177
6.3.3 Processes of change: the Relexification Hypothesis 181

6.4 Michif 183
6.4.1 Sociohistorical background 183
6.4.2 Sources of Michif structure 184
6.4.3 Phonology 185
6.4.4 NP structure 186
6.4.5 VP structure 187
6.4.6 Syntax of Michif 188
6.4.7 Convergence and innovation in Michif 189
6.4.8 Mechanisms and processes in the genesis of Michif 190
6.5 Creations Associated with Language Shift 193
6.6 The Case of Ma'a 193
6.6.1 Historical backgound 194
6.6.2 Structural features 194
6.6.3 The genesis of Ma'a 196
6.7 The Strange Case of Copper Island Aleut 198
6.7.1 Sociohistorical background 199
6.7.2 Structural characteristics of Copper Island Aleut 199
6.7.3 Processes and constraints in Copper Island Aleut origins 203
6.8 Summary 205
6.8.1 Sociohistorical background and social motivations 205
6.8.2 Processes and origins 206

7 Second Language Acquisition and Language Shift 208

I An Overview of Individual Second Language Acquisition 208
7.1 Introduction 208
7.2 L1 Influence in SLA 209
7.2.1 L1 influence on the TL lexicon 211
7.2.2 L1 influence on L2 phonology 212
7.2.3 L1 influence on L2 morphology 213
7.2.4 L1 influence on TL syntax 214
7.3 Simplification in SLA 217
7.4 Internal Developments in L2 Systems 219
7.5 Developmental Stages in SLA 220
7.5.1 General characteristics of early interlanguage 222

7.6 Strategies and Processes in SLA 223
7.7 Principles and Constraints on SLA 225
7.7.1 The early stages of SLA: processing and learning principles 225
7.7.2 Constraints in the elaboration of L2 grammar 227
7.7.3 Typological universals and SLA 230
7.7.4 Markedness constraints and L1 influence in SLA 231
7.7.5 Constraints on transfer 233
7.7.6 Cognitive principles and IL development 234
II Group Second Language Acquisition or Language Shift 235
7.8 Introduction 235
7.9 Irish English 237
7.9.1 Substratum influence on Irish English 239
7.10 "Indigenized" Englishes and Similar Contact Varieties 241
7.11 Issues in the Study of Language Shift 243
7.11.1 Processes of formation 243
7.11.2 Degrees of "fossilization" or approximation in group SLA 245
7.11.3 Colloquial Singapore English: a case of early IL "fossilization"? 245
7.12 Linguistic Constraints in Language Shift 247
7.12.1 Constraints on L1 influence 247
7.12.2 The concept of "transfer" in group SLA 248
7.12.3 Transfer as psycholinguistic process 251
7.13 Non-Structural Factors in Language Shift 252
7.14 Questions of Classification 254
III First Language Attrition and Death 256
7.15 Introduction 256
7.16 External (Social) Factors in Language Death 257
7.16.1 Macro-level social factors 257
7.16.2 Stages of language attrition and death 258
7.16.3 Sociolinguistic factors within the shifting community 259
7.17 The Linguistic Consequences of L1 Attrition 259
7.17.1 Language decay 261
7.18 Language Attrition in Relation to Other Contact Phenomena 263
7.19 Summary 264

8 Pidgins and Pidginization 268

8.1 Introduction: Definitions 268
8.2 Social Contexts of Pidgin Formation 270
8.3 Russenorsk: A Brief Sketch 273
8.4 Structural Characteristics of Pidgins 275
8.4.1 Pidgin morphology and syntax 275
8.4.2 Pidgin lexicon 276
8.4.3 Pidgin phonology 277
8.5 Pidgin Formation in Relation to Early SLA 278
8.5.1 Processes of pidgin formation 280
8.5.2 Principles and constraints in pidgin formation 286
8.6 Elaborated or Extended Pidgins 288
8.6.1 The origins and development of extended pidgins 289
8.6.2 Social contexts of early Pacific Pidgin English 289
8.6.3 The emergence of early Melanesian Pidgin 291
8.6.4 Further elaboration of MP grammar 293
8.7 Simplified Languages 297
8.8 Issues of Classification Revisited 299
8.9 Summary 301

9 Creole Formation 304

9.1 Introduction 304
9.2 Defining Creoles 305
9.3 The Sociohistorical Background to Creole Formation 309
9.3.1 Portuguese colonization 309
9.3.2 The social contexts of creole formation 310
9.3.3 Community settings and codes of interaction 312
9.4 The Emergence of "Intermediate" Creoles: Bajan 314
9.4.1 The social context 314
9.4.2 Linguistic inputs and outcomes in Barbados 315
9.5 The Emergence of Radical Creoles: Suriname 316
9.5.1 The sociohistorical background 317
9.6 Some Aspects of Creole Grammar 319
9.6.1 Creole phonology 319
9.6.2 Creole lexicon 321
9.6.3 Creole morphology and morphosyntax 322
9.6.4 Creole TMA systems 324
9.6.5 Creole syntax 326
9.7 Theories of Creole Formation 329
9.7.1 Reconstructing creole formation: a caveat 330

9.8 Radical Creole Formation as SLA 331
9.8.1 The target of acquisition 331
9.8.2 Restructuring in creole grammar 333
9.9 Mechanisms, Constraints, and Principles in Creole Formation 340
9.9.1 Constraints on the linguistic inputs 341
9.9.2 Substrate influence: mechanisms and constraints 341
9.9.3 Leveling in creole formation 345
9.10 Universal Principles and Creole Formation 346
9.10.1 Universals and L1 influence 347
9.10.2 Universals and internal developments 348
9.10.3 Grammaticalization in creoles 350
9.11 Externally Motivated Change in Later Creole Development 352
9.12 Summary 355

References 359
Index 387

1

Introduction: The Field of Contact Linguistics

1.1 The Subject Matter of Contact Linguistics

In offering his account of Caló, the mixture of Spanish and Romani used as an in-group language by Roma (Gypsies) in Spain, Rosensweig (1973) referred to it, in the very title of his book, as "Gutter Spanish." A flyer from a West Sussex bookseller advertising publications on "dialect and folk speech, pidgins and creoles," describes these forms of language, in boldface capitals, as "vulgar and debased English." Language mixture has always prompted strong emotional reaction, often in the form of ridicule, passionate condemnation, or outright rejection. Language purists have proscribed it as an aberration of the "correct" language, and their attitude is reflected in a lay perception of mixed languages as deviant, corrupt, and even without status as true languages. Thus Ambrose Gonzales, self-proclaimed student of the Gullah language, a "creole" language of mixed English and African ancestry spoken on islands off the South Carolina coast, explained its origins in this way:

> Slovenly and careless of speech, these Gullahs seized upon the peasant English used by some of the early settlers and by the white servants of the wealthier colonists, wrapped their clumsy tongues about it as well as they could, and, enriched with certain expressive African words, it issued through their flat noses and thick lips as so workable a form of speech that it was gradually adopted by the other slaves and became in time the accepted Negro speech of the lower districts of South Carolina and Georgia. (Gonzales 1922: 17–18)

While linguists and others might cringe at the sheer idiocy of this racist statement, many members of the public would probably accept the notion that languages like Gullah are the result of clumsy and ineffective learning. The truth, of course, is that these languages are testaments to the creativity of humans faced with the need to break down language barriers and create a

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