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Toward a unified framework for the study of contact-induced change.
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Abstract:

The emergent field of Contact Linguistics faces a number of fundamental challenges, not least of which is to reach agreement on a unified theoretical framework for the study of contact-induced change. All of the frameworks that have been proposed recognize two broad types of cross-linguistic influence, which Thomason & Kaufman (1988) originally referred to as “borrowing” versus “interference via shift” or “substratum influence.” But there still remains a surprising lack of consistency or consensus about the classification of contact-induced changes and the processes or mechanisms that create them. In this paper, I argue that van Coetsem’s (1988, 2000) framework offers the most comprehensive and unified model of contact-induced change, because it focuses on the cognitive processes involved in such change, and allow for links to be made between structural, sociolinguistic, and psycholinguistic approaches to language contact. Van Coetsem’s major contribution was to further refine the traditional distinction between “borrowing” and “interference” by distinguishing the kinds of agentivity they involve. His framework distinguishes between two transfer types, borrowing and imposition, which differ in terms of the dominance relationships between the languages in contact. Borrowing involves the agency of a speaker who is dominant in the recipient language, who transfers features of a source language into it – a process that van Coetsem refers to as recipient language (RL) agentivity. On the other hand, imposition involves the agency of a speaker who is dominant in the source language, features of which he transfers to a recipient language via source language (SL) agentivity. This conception of borrowing and imposition is compatible with psycholinguistic models of language production such as that introduced by Levelt (1989), and subsequently adapted by de Bot (2001) for bilingual language production. I will argue that this approach yields more promising insights into the processes and products of contact-induced change than other frameworks that have been proposed, such as Thomason & Kaufman’s (1988) socio-cultural framework, or Johanson’s (2002) code-copying framework. It allows us to make more accurate classifications of the products of language contact, as well as to define the shared mechanisms of change that lead to these products. On the one hand, the view of borrowing as a process that involves RL agentivity allows us to link contact phenomena that have been interpreted and classified in very different ways in the literature. Among them are lexical borrowing, classic code switching, relexification, and the creation of bilingual mixed languages. On the other hand, the view of imposition as a process involving SL agentivity allows for a single explanation of so-called “interference” phenomena, which embrace a wide array of outcomes that have been referred to variously as cases of structural convergence, indirect diffusion, grammatical replication, selective copying, convergence intertwining, and so on. I argue here that all of these phenomena are the result of imposition. I also argue that the ‘mechanisms’ that Heine & Kuteva (2005) propose for what they call “contact-induced grammaticalization” can be better interpreted in terms of the mechanism of imposition, which is related to more general cognitive processes that are involved in natural second language acquisition and processing, as well as in other kinds of language contact situations that involve an unequal linguistic dominance relationship between the languages in contact.

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