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Evangelia Adamou, Barbara E. Bullock & Almeida Jacqueline Toribio: Understanding Language Contact
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Tanulmány

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**Evangelia Adamou, Barbara E. Bullock &
Almeida Jacqueline Toribio:
Understanding Language Contact**

London: Routledge, 2023, 224 p.

Written by three of the most expert researchers in the field, *Understanding Language Contact* offers an updated introduction to contact linguistics. Instead of focusing on language contact outcomes, the book under review adopts a novel approach aimed at connecting these outcomes to the ongoing processes at the level of the bilingual mind. The book is divided into three parts, with each covering a particular area and providing a comprehensive overview alongside numerous examples from a variety of languages, including indigenous, minority and heritage languages; creoles, pidgins, and mixed languages to illustrate the relevant phenomena.

In part I (From milliseconds to minutes: what bilinguals do when they speak or sign), alignment, priming, conceptual transfer, cognitive cost and cognitive load are introduced in order to understand what happens at the level of the bilingual mind that would lead to language change over the years. The first chapter presents the theory of *interactive alignment* (see Pickering & Garrod 2004), suggesting that when communicating with others, people unconsciously and automatically align their language use with the language use of their interlocutors at many levels, ranging from pronunciation to grammar. This alignment can be achieved via *priming*, a mechanism by which a language user is likely to reuse patterns that were used in the past without even being aware of this. Chapter 2 delves further into understanding what happens when someone uses two languages with different conceptualizations. According to the authors, early bilinguals are capable of developing different conceptual representations for each language. However, for late bilinguals, this is quite challenging as they often experience instances of cross-linguistic influence from one language to the other (i.e. *conceptual transfer*). The authors end this chapter by referring to two interesting case studies: conceptual transfer for ‘to be’ in the case of Mexican Roma speakers (Adamou 2013; Adamou et al. 2019), and conceptual transfer for spatial representations among a small indigenous community in Mexico (Calderón et al. 2019). The last chapter in this section deals with two key concepts in the area of psycholinguistics: *cognitive costs* and *cognitive load*. Here, the authors argue that switching between different languages can increase cognitive costs due to the mental effort needed to select specific words and inhibit others depending on context. Research on cognitive load effects among L2 speakers shows inconsistent results given that such effects are influenced by the quality of the working memory.

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Part II (From minutes to years: what bilinguals do when they communicate with others) turns into discussing the effects of bilingualism at the level of the society. Chapter 4 begins by focusing on how bilinguals acquire and use their languages to communicate with others. It then moves on to explore the specific ways in which language varieties of bilingual repertoires are integrated. Finally, the chapter discusses *translanguaging* by which learners are allowed to use their entire language repertoire to support their learning process. Chapter 5 discusses the linguistic change that may occur when a person accommodates to the conversational style of the interlocutor. Unlike monolinguals, bilinguals have more complex accommodation strategies since they can operate in different language modes depending on multiple factors, including the topic of conversation, the context of conversation, and the interlocutors' linguistic background. Also, bilinguals have a broader range of social networks which is likely to affect their language choice and use over the years. Chapter 6 examines individual language contact with an emphasis on language acquisition and attrition. The authors initially present the competing theories on child language acquisition in order to perceive how monolingual and bilingual language acquisition differs from an early age. The chapter considers varying individual trajectories when looking at second language acquisition. It also explores how increasing attention to the L2 may lead to the deterioration of the L1 and to overall language variation and change. Chapter 7 delves into the concepts of *language attitudes* and *ideologies* in the context of language contact. In reviewing a plethora of studies on the topic, the authors make the distinction between language attitude as an individual evaluative reaction to a language variety and its speakers on the one hand and language ideology as a set of collective beliefs held by groups on the other. The chapter discusses how the standard language ideology, i.e., the belief that one language variety is superior to others, leads to detrimental effects including discrimination and stigmatisation of other languages, which demonstrates the influence of social beliefs about languages on the empowerment of certain groups over others in institutional services such as schools, media, and corporate sectors.

Part III (From years to centuries: how languages change through contact) encompasses the different ways in which languages are influenced by extensive contact with one another and the long-term consequences resulting from that. At the onset, Chapter 8 encapsulates contact-induced changes in both grammar and borrowing. The authors discuss how different aspects of one language infiltrate another, be that overtly as in the case of borrowing lexical items (loanwords) or covertly in the form of convergence whereby only the meaning or structure remains to be detected. The chapter highlights how loanwords integrate into the structure and pronunciation of the recipient language, becoming indistinguishable over time, but also affirms that some loanwords may not be assimilated without altering aspects of the linguistic patterns, syntax, and grammar of the recipient language. Furthermore, the authors explore the quantitative and qualitative ways in which convergence manifests and delineate its effect on the linguistic structure through processes such as grammaticalization. The chapter closes with guidelines on how to investigate contact-induced changes with reference to corpora-based approaches. Chapter 9 explores the concept of a *linguistic area*, which indicates that languages existing in geographical proximity, albeit different in origin, tend to converge over time due to rigorous language contact. Although great controversy surrounds what precisely constitutes a linguistic area in the academic community, the Balkans are uncontestedly accepted as such, given how languages in the region structurally converged over millennia despite their dissimilarity. The authors shed light on other linguistic areas, including Amazonia and Melanesia, which provides deep insights into the concept (for an overview, see Epps & Michael

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2017; Schapper 2021). Chapter 10 discusses the emergence of three types of language as a result of language contact: 1) *Creoles*, which historically appeared in settlement plantations as a result of a combination between Western European colonial languages and African languages of enslaved people, 2) *Pidgins*, which emerged from trade communication, and 3) *Mixed languages*, which arose in bilingual communities as cultural resistance to language shift. The authors touch upon the social circumstances ushering in the formation of these languages, the stigmatization they received, as well as their structural characteristics. The authors also draw attention to urban youth languages and their intentional formation as an act of defiance to the mainstream culture. Chapter 11 examines the linguistic practices of members of minority, immigrant, and heritage communities in contact with the dominant language of the country in which they reside. The authors discuss the phenomena of *language maintenance and shift* and argue that it is not bilingualism per se that stimulates the shift towards the dominant language but rather interference in the functioning of community life from external institutions. The chapter then explores two case studies of language maintenance within heritage and minority communities, namely French in Frenchville, USA (Matras 2002) as well as Romani across various settings (Mougeon & Uritesco 2006). The authors affirm variability in the use of heritage or minority languages as input dwindles, contact-induced changes take place, and language shift continues towards the dominant language.

Overall, the book is written in a clear and straightforward style to help readers understand the main concepts, theories, and methods in the field of contact linguistics. The organisation of content is especially commendable, as the book chronologically transitions from short-term to long-term language contact effects. This makes for an enjoyable reading experience while grabbing the readers' attention from beginning to end. Moreover, the book provides a wealth of research and information that is supposed to expand readers' knowledge on a wide range of topics in relation to the study of language contact. Particularly, it allows for a deeper understanding of how languages interact and evolve over time. Including a set of thought-provoking questions at the end of each chapter seems to fit the design of the book. Such questions serve as effective tools to test comprehension and encourage active engagement and critical thinking.

Nevertheless, the book does have its limitations. As part of a series aimed at providing fundamental knowledge on a variety of topics in linguistics, this book largely depends on pre-existing literature rather than offering new insights into the field of contact linguistics. Even though the book claims that it is also designed for advanced researchers in the field of contact linguistics, the work itself serves more as a pedagogical tool for students studying societal multilingualism, language variation, and language contact. The book includes a number of case studies to illustrate challenging concepts such as linguistic area and conceptual transfer, but they are by no means diverse enough to showcase how these concepts manifest in various contexts, languages, and communities. This might constitute a drawback for some readers who seek a more comprehensive understanding of the different aspects discussed in the book.

In light of the above, I believe that *Understanding Language Contact* should be considered an essential reference textbook for teachers, students, and anyone interested in how language changes when speakers of different languages interact. It provides a solid overview of language contact in a compelling, enjoyable, and instructive manner.

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