Typological and social constraints on language contact: Amerindian languages in contact with Spanish

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Citation for published version (APA):

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INTRODUCTION

Studies on language contact have been prolific in the last decades. The increasing interest of linguists in this particular field implies the recognition that languages do not develop independently from other languages, and that the outcomes of language contact result from adaptive answers of linguistic systems. From this point of view, contact linguistics offers the opportunity of studying the interaction of social motivations and linguistic factors in the process of language change: how nonlinguistic forces model human languages within the limits set by their structures. Nonetheless, one of the major shortcomings of most studies on language contact is their lack of a theory-driven approach and a solid empirical foundation, which reduces the cross-linguistic scope of their findings and the general reliability of their generalizations.

The present study deals with language contact from the perspective of linguistic borrowing. Its empiric foundation is an extensive corpus of spontaneous speech collected in the field. Its framework is the theory of parts of speech and the theory of contact typology. Because the main goal of this study is the identification of cross-linguistic regularities in borrowing, the recipient languages under scrutiny are different in their typological profile but similar in their contact with one donor language. In this way, differences in the outcomes of borrowing can be ascribed to differences in typology, just like similarities in the process of borrowing can be attributed to analogous contact situations. Accordingly, it is assumed that the comparison of borrowing tendencies in typologically different languages can shed light on how linguistic structure influences the outcomes of contact and the extent of such influence vis-à-vis nonlinguistic factors. The recipient languages selected for analysis are Quichua, Guaraní and Otomi while the donor language in contact with them is Spanish.

The first part of the book is theoretical in nature. It deals with the conceptual foundations for the analysis of linguistic borrowing. Crucial to such analysis is the development of a causation model of contact-induced language change, in which hierarchically ordered causes interact with each other at different levels. The model serves as a point of departure for the interpretation of linguistic and nonlinguistic factors in lexical and grammatical borrowing. Parts of speech, borrowability and morphological typology are discussed as linguistic factors modeling the outcomes of borrowing. All the theoretical elements are put together in a comprehensive research program which sustains the present investigation.

The second part describes the source language and the recipient languages in terms of their historical development, sociolinguistic status, dialectal variation and typology. The account of the historical development of each language provides a more accurate characterization of the intensity and duration of contact and the
expected degree of influence between the languages. The sociolinguistic description of the recipient languages in terms of their diglossic position and the societal levels of bilingualism in their respective speech communities enables a straightforward measurement of the pressure exerted by the source language on the recipient languages and the extent of borrowing. The classification of the languages in terms of parts of speech, morphological type, dialectal variation and other typological features sets the benchmark for the analysis of borrowing types. The historical, sociolinguistic and linguistic description of the languages unfolds in the framework of the causation model proposed in the first part and serves to make specific predictions about the borrowing behavior of each language.

The third part represents the analytic core of the book. It describes the findings from the analysis of corpora and compares these findings to the predictions made for each language in order to test the validity of the borrowing hypotheses. Lexical and grammatical borrowings receive individual treatment in terms of their contribution to overall borrowing, their morpho-phonological adaptation to the recipient language, and the uses to which borrowings are put in accordance with native or novel functional distinctions. The use of borrowings is tested for dialects and sociolects in order to determine the extent to which dialectal variation and bilingualism model borrowing behavior. The overall findings of lexical and grammatical borrowing are evaluated in the framework of the causation model and the contact-induced changes in the typological profile of the borrowing languages.

The main conclusions of this study point to the interplay of linguistic and nonlinguistic factors in the modeling of linguistic borrowing. The distribution of borrowings in any given language cannot be explained solely by either type of factors. The interplay of factors at different levels confirms the dynamic nature of the causation model proposed for the explanation of contact-induced changes. Also, the overall findings confirm that even if linguistic constraints can be overridden by nonlinguistic factors, the outcomes of borrowing are determined in principle by the structural possibilities of the participating languages. In sum, not everything goes in linguistic borrowing, because structural and other restrictions set the limits of language mixing. Typology seems to be a modeling factor even when structural limits are trespassed. This is due to the resistance of the basic typological parameters to change in both normal and contact situations. These parameters are largely preserved in the recipient languages of this study after hundreds of years of intense contact with the source language, even if incipient and moderate changes are attested in less crucial typological features.

The pressure exerted by the donor language on account of the hegemonic position of its speakers may induce major structural changes in the recipient language, but these changes are co-determined by the structural limits of its linguistic system, the level of societal and individual bilingualism, and the attitude of speakers towards language mixing. Cases of massive borrowing are therefore
those in which speakers refuse to abandon their language and adapt it to the discursive and communicative needs imposed by the dominant language. This is all the more evident in multicultural and multilingual contexts, in which the orientedness of language towards the accomplishment of communicative goals is at stake. In this perspective, the languages of this study are survivors of a long history of intense contact because they have been flexible enough to adapt to the new socio-communicative settings of the colonial society.

In addition, the present study demonstrates that scales of borrowing or hierarchies of borrowability are not cross-linguistically valid, and that typological, sociolinguistic and historical considerations are always necessary to make them more precise and refine their predictive capacity. For example, as demonstrated by one of the languages of this study, the often assumed predominance of lexical over grammatical borrowing can be reversed in a context of rapid language shift and increasing levels of bilingualism, provided grammatical borrowings accommodate to the structure of the recipient language. In all, any evaluation of scales or hierarchies of borrowing must be language-specific and consider both linguistic and nonlinguistic factors in accordance with a multi-level dynamic model of causation.

While the analysis addresses a number of issues about the relation between linguistic borrowing, language typology and bilingualism, it necessarily leaves several questions open. Some of them concern the relation between code switching and borrowing, the relation between phrasal borrowing and code switching, the influence of semantic restrictions or distributional rules on the use of loanwords, the influence of language loyalty on language mixing in situations of diglossia and intense contact, and the diachronic study of the borrowing process on the basis of historical records. These and other questions are part of an agenda for future research in the field of language contact.