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

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Chapter 1

Taking a stand

To state that language contact is as old as language itself may sound as an exaggeration to the ears of those who consider languages self-contained entities developing on their own, but it is less so if we think for a moment that it is not languages per se that are in contact, but speakers. In these terms, language contact is expected every time two or more groups of speakers meet, and thus language contact implies as much motion of people as transfer of languages. To what extent the borrowing of lexicon and grammar is rule-governed in language contact and reflects the internal organization of the languages involved, and to what extent social and cultural factors play a role in such process are the main questions I attempt to answer in this book.

The relatively recent idea that language contact is a window on linguistic structures has given a new impulse to contact studies over the last years. In this perspective, language contact mirrors the ways in which languages react as dynamic structures to their sociocultural environments. Imbued with the same spirit, I intend to give new insights into how languages react to other languages by accommodating their structures and their usage.

At the heart of this research is the debate about the typological constraints on language contact. Whereas some authors take the existence of these constraints for granted (e.g. Hill and Hill 1986), others downplay linguistic factors (e.g. Thomason and Kaufman 1988), and still others deny their contribution categorically (e.g. Thomason 2001). I do not pretend to settle the issue here. On the contrary, I will add fuel to the fire by showing that the typological profile of the languages in contact is relevant when it comes to explaining the linguistic outcomes of such contact, but that it is far from being the only factor involved. As nowadays no one can disregard the major role played by social factors in linguistic change, the real question is how typological and social factors interact. This study is a contribution to understand such interaction.

While the present research is framed in the overall debate of contact-induced language change, its results are limited to the specific cases analyzed here and should not be generalized across the board. Considering the variety of contact scenarios around the world, any statement made on the basis of the data and the analysis presented in this book should be mapped onto other languages and contact situations with extreme caution. It is hoped that similar studies be undertaken for other languages in order to enlarge the gamut of contact situations under examination.
1.1. On languages and theories

From the numberless aspects of language contact, the present study deals with borrowing, both lexical and grammatical. It is based on the investigation of extensive corpora of spontaneous speech collected for three recipient languages (Guaraní, Quichua and Otomí) which have been in contact with one donor language (Spanish) for the last four centuries with more or less intensity. The purpose is to identify what types of borrowing from the donor language occur in the recipient languages and how they are used. The choice of these languages is motivated by the fact that any systematic assessment of the output of contact is feasible only to the extent that the target languages are different from each other in their typological profile while the donor language is kept constant in each case. This procedure allows us to compare results and inquire into possible explanations that include typological and social factors. Further reasons for the choice of these languages are the large size of their speaking communities and the availability of good grammatical descriptions, all of which facilitates the collection and analysis of data.

Because the present study seeks to identify principles in the borrowing of lexical and grammatical elements and their use in the recipient languages, two different approaches have been adopted depending on the type of borrowing. For lexical borrowing, I take the concept of parts of speech as the tool for analysis. The theory of parts of speech developed by Hengeveld (1992) and Hengeveld et al (2004) offers a benchmark by virtue of its typological approach – required to understand the idiosyncrasies of the donor language and the recipient languages. This theory defines parts of speech on the basis of functional-syntactic criteria and classifies languages according to the use of lexical classes in syntactic slots. To the extent that it focuses on major word classes (i.e. verbs, nouns, adjectives, and adverbs) the theory is relevant for the analysis of lexical borrowing. For grammatical borrowing I take as a point of departure the hierarchies of borrowability proposed in several studies on language contact, typology and grammaticalization (cf. Muysken 1981b, 1999; Lehmann 1986; Croft 1990; Heine et al 1991; Bakker and Hekking 1999; Bakker et al 2008.). Hierarchies of borrowability show which word classes are borrowed more frequently than others. These hierarchies encompass lexical and grammatical borrowings and serve as comprehensive frames for testing hypotheses. The corpora of the recipient languages provide the empirical basis for such testing.

1.2. The structure of this book

Chapter 2 offers a critical review of a number of issues in the field of language contact, including theories on the interaction of linguistic and social factors and the types of contact outcomes. Special attention is paid to the discussion of similarities and differences between borrowing and codeswitching, since both categories
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intersect in various ways. The first part of Chapter 3 sets the theoretical framework for the study of lexical borrowing in terms of parts of speech (Hengeveld 1992; 2004) and develops a number of hypotheses with respect to the borrowing of word classes. The second part of Chapter 3 presents an overview of hypotheses of grammatical borrowing and relates them to the case studies under scrutiny. Chapter 4 presents the research program in detail, including a description of the methods used in sampling, collecting, parsing and analyzing data, as well as other methodological issues relevant for the investigation.

A detailed study of the languages in contact is presented in chapters 5 through 8. Chapter 5 discusses the evolution of Spanish in Latin America and focuses on the contact areas of the Andes, Paraguay and central Mexico. Chapters 6 to 8 are devoted each to one recipient language. Therein I address the historical background and the linguistic factors that feature the contact situation of the recipient languages with Spanish. The discussion focuses on the ways native speakers adapt their languages to sociocultural pressures from the mainstream society and the various levels of bilingualism in the speech communities. Each chapter discusses the parts-of-speech system and other typological features of the language in question and develops specific borrowing hypotheses. The hypotheses are discussed in comparative perspective in Chapter 9.

Chapter 10 analyses the statistics of lexical borrowing according to the hypotheses from the theory of parts of speech. The distribution of parts of speech in the corpora and the use of lexical borrowings in the recipient languages are discussed thoroughly in that chapter. The analysis follows a comparative approach in order to identify frequencies and tendencies attributable to the typology of the participating languages, their dialectal variation and their levels of bilingualism. Chapter 11 analyses the statistics of grammatical borrowing and elaborates on bilingualism as a relevant factor in the borrowing and use of grammatical items. Chapter 12 presents the conclusions from the analysis of borrowing data in previous chapters and discusses the implications for language contact research. Annotated texts extracted from each corpus are provided in the appendices so that readers have enough material to compensate the fragmentary nature of the examples discussed in the analytic chapters.