

## Language contact and language change in multilingual contexts

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Each language community (save for a very few confined to a distant island or an inaccessible mountain valley) is in contact with other communities, speaking different languages. The communities will interact, through trade, shared festivals and rituals, inter-marriage, and maybe wars. Through all this, their languages change. They may come to sound more similar. They may borrow some lexical items and forms from closed classes, and even bound morphemes. And some structural and organisational features of the languages may also converge. Profound restructuring may occur, and new contact languages emerge. The extent of this varies, depending on numerous social and cultural factors, including the degrees of speakers' knowledge of each other's languages, the domains in which different languages are used, and the type of language contact. And also the degrees of speakers' awareness and appreciation of their linguistic repertoires, and sense of purism. A steadily growing body of literature on language contact and subsequent language change reflects the importance of this interaction in its many guises.

Languages mirror the social history of their speakers. A wide range of sociolinguistic parameters impact the outcomes of language contact in different ways. New language varieties emerge under new circumstances. Some of these varieties may be typical of young and innovative speakers; others may be a feature of a diasporic community. Some of those will survive the test of time and eventually evolve into established linguistic repertoires. Others will not last beyond one generation – and will be depleted and lost under the pressure of majority languages. What better way to further our understanding of the mechanisms and the outcomes of language interaction than to embark on the studies of unexplored languages and new language situations from the hotspots of linguistic diversity? This was the aim of our joint project 'Language emergence in multilingual contexts', led by Alexandra Aikhenvald and Péter Maitz.<sup>1</sup> This issue contains a selection of papers based on talks presented at the International Workshop 'Language contact and the emergence of hybrid grammars' within this project, organized jointly by the Language

and Culture Research Centre and the University of Augsburg (Cairns 11-12 July 2018).

Creole and Pidgin languages are perhaps the most prominent examples of new languages arising under new circumstances. As European colonisation spread around the world, European languages infiltrated numerous areas, giving rise to new language varieties. Bringing indigenous people from various language groups together – on plantations and other forced-work environments – has created novel forms of dominant languages for inter-group communication. Among them are European-based Creoles, such as Tok Pisin, one of the national languages of Papua New Guinea. Unserdeutsch, or Rabaul Creole German, is another case in point. Unserdeutsch, or ‘our German’, is the only attested Creole language with a German lexifier. In contrast to many well-documented Creoles, Unserdeutsch was developed by children from varied linguistic backgrounds in a boarding school environment and has always been an in-group language, rather than a language of inter-ethnic communication. This resonates with novel language varieties by younger people in indigenous and diasporic communities – one of the topics of this issue.

Following the decolonization of Papua New Guinea, the Unserdeutsch community got dispersed. Many of its members migrated to various locations to Australia, and only a number of elderly speakers are still around. As a result, the language is severely endangered (a comprehensive analysis of the history and the properties in Unserdeutsch is in Maitz & Volker 2017, and Maitz 2016). This is not unlike many Creole languages on the verge of extinction (as described by Garrett 2006) and other varieties limited to specific contexts, including in-group youth languages, such as the ‘Bilingual Navajo’ (also known as ‘Boarding School Navajo’) (Schaengold 2004, O’Shanessy 2011). The spectre of language endangerment and language loss haunts many of the newly emergent linguistic forms discussed throughout this issue.

As communities migrate and come in contact with other groups, new blended varieties emerge. A group of speakers of the Kumandene Tariana language of northwest Amazonia escaped the aggressive oppression of Salesian missionaries, venturing into the depth of the jungle, and from there on to the village of Santa Terezinha, originally occupied by speakers of Baniwa of Içana, a closely related language. As a result, the Kumandene Tariana language imbibed many Baniwa features, in grammar and in lexicon, making it similar to numerous blended languages, among them Surzhyk from the Ukraine, Trasjanka from Belarus, and Ojicree, from Canada. The extent of the Baniwa influence on Kumandene Tariana varies depending on the speaker, and on the audience. The Kumandene Tariana are a minority within the village, and

fewer and fewer people acquire it in its full form. With a high degree of individual variation and a growing dominance of the numerically dominant Baniwa, its long-term survival remains problematic. On the other hand, the language continues to play a role as a mark of identity for those who identify as Kumandene Tariana – a factor which may help it survive, albeit in a modified way, incorporating more and more elements from the dominant Baniwa. This is the topic of Alexandra Aikhenvald's contribution 'Blended grammar: Kumandene Tariana of northwest Amazonia'.

How many more blended varieties may have existed throughout the tumultuous history of Amazonian languages and the centuries of Amazonian migrations? Historically, we know of a few examples of depleted minority groups merging together and forming new communities of multiple ethnic origins. These include the Palikur, speakers of an Arawak language in the Brazilian state of Amapá and in French Guyana; the Kamaiurá, a Tupí-Guaraní language from the Xingu National park in Brazil, the Yucuna, a North Arawak speaking group in Colombian Amazonia, and the Wai Wai (or Waiwai) in Brazil and adjacent regions of Suriname, to name a few (see a summary and the references in Aikhenvald 2020). One can only assume that many more may have passed into oblivion, unnoticed and undocumented.

Several hundred indigenous and immigrant languages form part and parcel of the multilingual and multicultural tapestry of many Anglophone countries, Australia among them. Immigrant languages vary in their vitality and maintenance, number of speakers, degree of multilingualism and interactions with the country of origin (e.g. Clyne & Kipp 1999, Clyne 1991). How do immigrant languages survive in diasporic contexts? What kinds of changes do they undergo – and how do speakers navigate their multilingual repertoires –, in a quest to maintain languages and cultures, critical to their identities and well-being in their new homeland? This is the topic of Nathan M. White's contribution 'Language and variety mixing in diasporic Hmong'.

The Hmong people are relative newcomers within the Australian scene. The language belongs to the Hmongic branch of the Hmong-Mien family. It is spoken by over five million people in Asia, from south-western China (where the Hmong are part of the Miao ethnic minority) to northern Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, and Myanmar. What sets the Hmong apart from many other diasporic communities is their centuries-old history of forced migrations. This began with pressure to move into remote mountainous areas in southern China, and subsequent settlement in French Indochina (Vietnam and Laos), and their flight from southern China in the mid 1800s, as a consequence of their involvement in sev-

eral disastrous rebellions against the Chinese central state. The Hmong then formed part of the refugee intake from Indochina by Western countries – Australia, USA, and France – fleeing from the aftermaths of the Vietnam war and the war in Laos. Not surprisingly in this context, the question of what the Hmong consider to be their ‘homelands’ is a complex one.

The largest number of the Hmong outside Asia have now settled in various regions of the USA, from Minnesota to California, with smaller communities in Canada, Germany, France, French Guiana, Argentina, and Australia. Hmong can be considered a pluricentric language. The first Hmong families moved to Australia in March 1976 (Lee 2004). Subsequent waves of migrants continued arriving until the mid-1990s, often after long periods of time in refugee camps in Thailand (see Jarkey 2015, Lee 2004, and White 2021 for additional details). The linguistic outcome of this complex history of the Hmong is a ‘layered’ language (in the sense of Aikhenvald 2006), with large amounts of lexical and grammatical material incorporated from Chinese, Thai and Lao, and nowadays also English. A very special trait of Hmong in Queensland – where the majority of the Australian diasporic Hmong reside – is the nascent development of a new blended variety of the language which combines features of White Hmong and Green Mong, effectively merging the traditionally distinct – albeit mutually intelligible and very close – varieties. The newly emergent blend is especially prominent among younger speakers, for some of whom the identity of the two varieties is at times ambiguous. In other words, they struggle to differentiate the two.

This is not uncommon in immigrant languages. In many, differences between dialects may tend to be erased under pressure from the dominant variety (as has been shown for Greek in the Australian diaspora by Alvanoudi 2019). Alternatively, the status of language varieties can be redefined in a diasporic environment. For young British-born descendants of Cypriot Greek, features of their native variety have become part and parcel of the in-group slang, within the context of the urban Greek diaspora in the UK whose dominant language is Standard Greek (Karatsareas 2020). Sadly, due to imminent shift to English by those under thirty, the diasporic Hmong in Australia appears to be facing a looming decline and obsolescence – an ultimate impediment to the creation of a blended new Hmong as a part of people’s established linguistic repertoire.

All over the world, younger generations are agents of change. They tend to speak differently from older generation creating new and experimental varieties which challenge the established norm. Recent years have seen an upsurge in studies of younger peoples’ languages and

repertoires, with a strong focus on newly emergent varieties in Africa (see, for instance, Mous 2009, Nassenstein & Hollington 2015, and Groff *et al. forthcoming*) and in Western Europe (see, for instance, Nortier & Svendsen 2015, and Quist & Svendsen 2010). In a situation of increasing bilingualisms and pressure from the majority language, younger speaker varieties are frequently characterised by an influx of loan forms and patterns from the majority language, so much so that their way of speaking may become markedly different from that of the traditional guardians of the language. So much so that in the case of the Murui of the Colombian Amazonia the new variety used by youngsters has been given a name – Muruiñoiz, a severely Hispanicised Murui. This is the topic of Katarzyna I. Wojtylak's contribution 'Language contact and change: the case of Muruiñoiz from northwest Amazonia'.

A striking feature of Muruiñoiz is numerous loans and code-switches from Colombian Spanish. These include lexical forms, and also members of closed classes – especially the ubiquitous Spanish conjunctions *i* (Spanish *y*) 'and', *pero* (Spanish *pero*) 'but', and *entonces* (Spanish *entonces*) 'then, so'. The impact of Spanish goes beyond just forms. We find a number of phonological changes, such as the replacement of the voiceless apico-dental fricative [θ] with a loan voiceless apico-alveolar [s]. Some of the traditional grammatical features are being lost – these include the negative attributive marker. One also finds subtle grammatical changes. For instance, in the traditional language genitive marked pronouns could not be used as modifiers, and now they can be. Traditionally, gardens could not be possessed by just one person. Nowadays, young people have gardens of their own, and the word 'garden' comes to be used with a singular possessor (to the older speakers' annoyance). A new, hitherto unknown superlative construction is another feature of young people's language. These phenomena resonate with what we find in younger speakers' ways of using minority languages across the world. Younger speakers of Anong, a Tibeto-Burman language of the Lisu Autonomous prefecture in the Yunnan Province of China, use number words from the related Lisu alongside their own (Sun & Liu 2009: 136-7). Younger speakers of Hinuq, a north-east Caucasian language spoken in Dagestan, use Russian conjunctions, alongside the original forms (Forker 2013: 451, 540). Further syntactic features of younger peoples' language varieties, with special focus on the Australian scene, and especially within the context of language obsolescence, are discussed by Dixon (2015: 328, 2019: 169-70) and Schmidt (1985).

The emergence of Muruiñoiz is paralleled by the existence of special South American varieties of the two major languages, Spanish and Portuguese. The Portuguese and Spanish spoken across Amazonia differ

in a number of respects from the languages spoken in their European homeland. Indigenous languages, even those long forgotten, have left their imprint on the Amazonian varieties of Spanish and Portuguese (see, for instance, Adelaar 2004: 589-602 on Andean Spanish, and chapters in Fafulas 2020). The body of studies on new varieties of Amazonian Spanish and Amazonian Portuguese is steadily growing. In contrast, Wojtylak's contribution dealing with an innovative indigenous language of Amazonia is – so far – unique.

The Murui language has not yet reached the stage of endangerment: it is still learnt and used by children (even if in a reduced and modified way). However, the influx of Spanish forms and the spread of Spanish as a dominant language constitute a definite threat to its maintenance for future generations. How stable is Muruiño, and what are the odds for its survival? According to O'Shannessy (2011: 86), the appearance of the newly emergent in-group youth languages, including Light Warlpiri and Gurinji Kriol, and their maintenance within the Australian linguistic scene are signs of resistance to language shift and loss, and the establishment of a local identity within a wider indigenous language speech community. Whether or not Muruiño will follow this path and continue being transmitted to further generations is yet to be seen.

An influx of loan forms and loan patterns is not a sign of language's demise; nor does it imply simplification or depletion of language's structure (as pointed out by Johanson 2002). Chamacoco, a Zamucoan language from Paraguay, has been under strong pressure from Spanish ever since the start of regular contacts with the European invaders in 1885. This is the topic of Luca Ciucci's contribution, 'The hispanization of Chamacoco syntax'. The language has incorporated numerous loans from Spanish, from human classification and kinship terms, to artefacts and verbs (contrary to some previous assumptions that verbs cannot be borrowed directly). An influx of borrowed function words sets Chamacoco apart from related languages. They include prepositions, conjunctions, discourse markers, and universal quantifiers. Some borrowed subordinators combine a Spanish form with the original Chamacoco subordinator *uje*, thus bringing about new and more complex ways of expressing syntactic relations between clauses. Chamacoco has also evolved a new comparative construction, formally influenced by Spanish – another contact-induced addition to the repertoire of linguistic expressions. Alongside contact-induced changes, Chamacoco has preserved a number of archaic features shared with its Zamucoan relatives. A most striking archaic trait includes para-hypotaxis, whereby a coordinating conjunction occurs between a dependent clause and a main clause (a detailed study of the phenomenon is in Bertinetto & Ciucci

2012). A combination of old and new accounts for the complex fabric of the Chamacoco grammar. The contact-induced changes discussed in this contribution are a feature of all generations of speakers. However, similar to Muruiño, younger people tend to use Spanish loans more often than others. And at present, the pressure from Spanish is threatening the survival of Chamacoco, as is the case of so many languages across South America.

Distinguishing similarities due to genetic inheritance and common origin of languages from those due to contact and borrowings of varied kinds is a major conundrum in comparative linguistics. This is especially difficult in situations of prolonged diffusion of linguistic (and cultural) traits across a region. Bodish languages of Bhutan, a hotspot of linguistic diversity in the Eastern Himalayas, are a case in point. In his contribution entitled 'On Bodish languages in Bhutan: language contact, genetic inheritance and parallelism in drift', Pema Wangdi focuses on four related languages of the region: Brokpa, Classical Tibetan, and the national language Dzongkha and a lingua franca Tshangla. Brokpa and Dzongkha form a lower-level genetic subgroup 'Central Bodish'. Brokpa and Tshangla are in close contact, but their genetic relationship is more distant. The position of Classical Tibetan is rather special: no longer a spoken language, it is used as a medium of instruction in monasteries and as the language of liturgy. Its influence is felt in all Bhutanese languages. The dynamics of development of the four languages shows a combination of contact-induced changes with genetic inheritance, independent innovations, and also parallelism in drift – that is, the mechanism whereby related languages 'will pass through the same or strikingly similar phases' (Sapir 1921: 171-2). Bodish languages are not averse to borrowing bound morphemes: for instance, Brokpa has borrowed a plural marker =*ba?* from Tshangla. A contact-induced change in Dzongkha involves a tendency to replace the negative prefix *mi-* by *ma-*, under the impact of Tshangla *ma-*: this is an instance of grammatical accommodation, involving a change in meaning or form of a marker based on segmental similarity with another language (see Aikhenvald 2006: 24). The interaction of various motivations of language change across the four Bodish languages accounts for their complex phonological, morphological and syntactic patterns.

The creation of young people's varieties, the newly emergent languages of diaspora, language blends, and related languages in contact with each other, addressed in this issue, reflect the rich array of what human language can do, in response to emergent and ongoing communication needs. As Ameka put it (2006: 140), 'a holistic understanding

of grammatical change requires multiple perspectives'. This is what our contributions here are striving to achieve.

### Notes

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