Isabelle Léglise and Claudine Chamoreau (eds.)

_The Interplay of Variation and Change in Contact Settings_, 2013, 264 pages.

As Winford claims in his _Afterword_, “a book dealing with the role of variation in shaping contact-induced change in situations involving different languages is highly welcome for various reasons” (253). On the one hand, “studies in contact linguistics have generally focused on diachronic linguistic results at the expense of exploring either social processes or linguistic phenomena such as variation and ongoing change” (Léglise and Chamoreau, 1–2). On the other, “in contrast, sociolinguistic research on variation has from its beginning mostly focused on monolingual populations even if the speech communities under consideration were heterogeneous and socially and linguistically diverse” (2); this obviously holds true when referring to sociolinguistic research _à la_ Labov, considering that European sociolinguistics has been focusing on multilingual communities since its beginning. It follows that language contact and language variation, intending the latter as investigated from a ‘Labovian’ sociolinguistic perspective, have been explored thus far mostly independently from one another, even when tackling their implications for language change in multilingual settings. Such a situation clearly yields a gap in our knowledge of contact-induced language change, with respect to both its linguistic mechanisms and its patterns of social diffusion. This book edited by Isabelle Léglise and Claudine Chamoreau aims indeed to integrate the two aforementioned research traditions, and the papers collected in it address numerous crucial issues which are at the crossroads between contact linguistics and variationist sociolinguistics.

One such issue comes to the fore as early as in the introductory chapter and concerns the very notion of language change. Léglise and Chamoreau recall the classic threefold distinction (see e.g. Coseriu 1958) in meaning regarding the concept of language change (3–5). The first interpretation sees change occurring when a new form or structure appears in a linguistic system. The second states that an innovation cannot be called change until it undergoes social diffusion; inherent in this meaning is the propagation of an innovation and hence its competition with previously existing counterparts. According to the third interpretation, one can speak of change only when an innovation finally becomes conventionalized. Needless to say, these different conceptions of change relate to different stages of development of an innovation along the well-known S-shaped curve of language change. Moreover, different meanings of change can entail different perspectives on the study of language change.
Studies in language contact focus primarily on either the initiation or the completion of a change, whereas studies in language variation typically deal with the diffusion of a certain feature and its coexistence with other variants.

Although the book brings together different approaches to language change, we may say that they all share a common perspective, one which is consistent with the second idea of language change. Investigating change in such a sense implies both accounting for the linguistic mechanisms by which an innovation arises (e.g. those related to the retention of L1 features in second or foreign language acquisition) and addressing the extralinguistic factors which promote its diffusion and contribute to determining its social meaning (e.g. the attachment of prestige). The distinction between the linguistic mechanisms and the social diffusion of a contact-induced change, which is crucial for some theoretical models of intergenerational transmission in language contact (cf. Van Coetsem 2000), comes into play when analyzing most of the case studies addressed in the book (see below).

The first and the third meaning of change are tackled as well, especially in order to discuss various theoretical questions they raise. It is indeed puzzling to ascertain the initiation as well as the completion of a change. This is a well-known matter in contact-induced grammaticalization research, e.g. in Norde (2009) who, among others, argues that some cases classified as instances of degrammaticalization in the relevant literature should actually be treated as cases of ‘retraction’ (in the sense of Haspelmath 2004), as the grams in question have erroneously been considered as new.

More broadly, it is worth recalling that a given change may affect and eventually reach completion in only a few varieties of the recipient language (see e.g. Johanson 2002). One such example involves the case of direct object elision in American Spanish (Palacios, 179–187), whose restrictions are partly due to contact with Amerindian languages. Palacios maintains that in each of the linguistic communities considered, “simplified pronominal systems compete with more traditional ones, even in the speech of the same individual” (186); namely, conservative pronominal systems in which the elision occurs only if the reference is indefinite, e.g. ¿Trajiste los libros? No, no los/*Ø traje (“Did you bring the books? No, I didn’t bring them”), coexist with systems in which the elision is constrained only by the animacy of the referent, e.g. ¿Trajiste los libros? No, no Ø traje, as well as with systems in which the elision is not constrained at all.

It may be added, finally, that it is not rare to find changes which do not reach completion; in the words of Labov (2001: 74), “stable, long-term variation that persists over many centuries in much the same form is perhaps even more common than changes which go to completion”. By way of example, the
negative concord and the alternation of [n] and [ŋ] in unstressed -ing syllables, which Meyerhoff (25–35) draws on to illustrate the main principles of language variation and change, are typically considered 'stable variables' in variationist sociolinguistics.

Focusing on change in progress, the book pays special attention to the social factors responsible for the diffusion of a given change within a linguistic community. These factors inevitably differ depending on the various contact settings and may relate to community-specific social conditions and social changes. An example of how language contact and specific socio-historical factors are intertwined in shaping morpho-syntactic changes can be seen in Pana (a Central Gur language) and Northern Samo (an Eastern Mande language), both spoken in Burkina Faso (Beyer and Schreiber, 107–134). Yet another is the loss of an evidentiality marker in Pomak, a Slavic vernacular spoken in Greece (Adamou, 229–252). All the papers in this book seem to take the stance that throughout the world complex contact settings constitute the norm rather than the exception. As argued in various chapters, this requires a refinement of linear models such as Thomason and Kaufmann's borrowing scale and the need to investigate which community-specific social parameters are to be taken into account when exploring the relationships between language and society.

Moreover, as is well-known, certain levels of the linguistic system are less subject than others to the influence of such social factors as prestige. This issue is hinted at by Meyerhoff who, among others, maintains that "social factors are less likely to have a significant effect on syntactic variables than they are on phonetic variables" (32), since "syntax is a discrete module of the grammar, [...] a particularly deep kind of knowledge, qualitatively different from phonetic variation" (33; cf. Labov 2001: 83). Meyerhoff herself addresses what seems to be an exception to this assumption by discussing the existence of social factors which constrain the use of negative concord in Los Angeles Chicano English; she argues that this could be due to the fact that speakers treat negative concord as a lexical variable rather than a syntactic variable (which raises essential theoretical questions about where linguistic variation is located; cf. Cornips and Corrigan 2005). Furthermore, Meyerhoff notes that negative concord attracts social evaluation and is explicitly corrected in formal education; hence, it does not seem to lie below the level of conscious awareness. The presence of negative concord in Los Angeles Chicano English is also a clear example of how language variation and language contact can interplay in multilingual settings. Negative concord is indeed inherent in World Englishes (as a 'vernacular universal'; according to Chambers 2009); however, in a setting such as Los Angeles, this tendency may be reinforced by the contact with Spanish, in which negative concord is standard.
The intertwining of language-internal tendencies and language contact is one of the main topics of the book and recurs throughout the chapters. Such an intertwining between internal and external forces is addressed in the hope of determining the respective roles played by inherent tendencies and language contact. Moreover, the linguistic phenomena investigated result primarily from structural convergence.

From this standpoint, a relevant case is investigated by Palacios (167–179). She compares the tendency to simplify the third person unstressed pronominal system in Peninsular Spanish with that observable in American Spanish. The former is characterized by the neutralization of the accusative/dative distinction, retaining gender differentiation; instead, the latter is changing to a case-based system without gender differentiation (in which the dative imposes its morphology on the accusative), leading, in certain areas, to a further development consisting in a single pronominal form. The latter outcome, which goes far beyond the internally generated effect observable in Peninsular Spanish, is affected by contact with Amerindian languages, which do not morphologize gender; in fact, it is not attested in the absence of pervasive historical bilingualism.

Similar results emerge from the investigation carried out by Léglise (137–163). She examines two phenomena affecting object pronouns in Guianese French: the neutralization of the distinction between direct and indirect object pronouns (especially in the third person plural; e.g. *on les disait* vs. *on leur disait* “we said to them”), and the absence of pronominal object anaphora (especially in the third person; e.g. *tu as déjà écrit?* vs. *tu l’as déjà écrit?* “did you already write it?”). Such phenomena reflect an inherent tendency of French, which is attested in various French-speaking countries and is arguably reinforced by Guianese Creole. Furthermore, Léglise points out that the contact with Creole not only reinforces a language-internal tendency but also widens the range of variation observable in the object clitics domain of Guianese French. The increase in variation within the repertoire represents a possible outcome of the contact between a converging and a converged-to language; such convergence “normally reduces the degree of intersystemic variation. Intra-systemically, however, the degree of variation may increase since speakers can choose linguistic variants from a larger repertoire” (Røyneland 2010: 260).

As far as methodology is concerned, investigations of this kind call into question the so-called “if in doubt do without” mentality, i.e. the belief that most changes are due to internal factors – and that, as a consequence, language contact should be dealt with only when internal causes of change cannot be found – and its reverse, i.e. the assumption that the majority of changes
are due to language contact – following that inherent tendencies need not be considered in contact settings. Both claims “mask the fact that each factor may play a role” (Léglise and Chamoreau, 11).

It is no coincidence that most contributors are interested in the distribution of a given phenomenon in the earlier stages of a language and in different contact settings. Given a linguistic outcome attributable both to inherent tendencies and language contact, the interweaving of internal and external forces can indeed be disentangled by exploring whether such an outcome is less likely to occur outside a specific contact situation (Thomason 2001: 1645). For this reason, a ‘panlectal’ approach to variation (Léglise, 141) proves to be particularly fruitful, as it explores the presence of a certain phenomenon in the same language across time and space. A case in point, among others, is the rise of *tu* and *vous* to the detriment of *on* for indefinite reference (Blondeau, 53–75), which is an inherent tendency of French worldwide. By way of a corpus-based analysis, Blondeau compares on the one hand French spoken in Quebec in the 19th century (when English-French contact was less intense) with that spoken in the 20th century, and on the other, present-day French spoken as L1 by Montrealers with that spoken by young bilingual Anglo-Montrealers; she then takes into account the linguistic behaviors of L1 speakers in France and L2 speakers in the United States. The aforementioned tendency turns out to be at a more advanced stage among Anglo-Montrealers, highlighting the role of bilingual practices in a setting where contact with English is (nowadays) intense.

At the same time, the cross-linguistic distribution of a given phenomenon can come into play to make a distinction between different kinds of contact-induced change. For example, it serves as a criterion to distinguish between the two types of contact-induced grammaticalization, ‘ordinary’ vs. ‘replica’ (as termed by Heine and Kuteva 2003): “Cases of replica grammaticalization are fairly easy to identify when the model language has developed a grammatical category by using a conceptual source that is rarely encountered cross-linguistically and where exactly the same source is used by speakers of the replica language” (Heine and Kuteva 2003: 540). A case in point may be the contact-induced development of a future imperative in Sakha (a Turkic language spoken in North-Eastern Siberia), analyzed by Pakendorf (216–220), since a temporal distinction in the imperative mood is cross-linguistically rare. Conversely, “cross-linguistically frequent constructions might have some inherent features that make them easier to process, thus providing an internal stimulus for selection of a particular variant over the other” (Pakendorf, 221).

As for contact-induced change, the investigation conducted by Meyerhoff (35–49) of subject and object deletion in Bislama (an English-lexified Creole)
and Tamambo (an Eastern Oceanic language with which Bislama is in contact) stands out as an innovative methodological and theoretical contribution to the bridging of sociolinguistics and contact linguistics. Meyerhoff argues for distinguishing between three different types of transfer on the basis of the results of multivariate analysis: (1) weak transfer, when the same factor groups are significant in both languages; (2) strong transfer, when, in addition to (1), the ordering of these factor groups is the same in both languages; and (3) calquing, when, in addition to (1) and (2), both languages share the same ranking of factors within each significant factor group. Such a theoretical proposal clearly advances the contribution of multivariate analysis to the study of language contact, which is grounded on the assumption that “the evidence from constraint ranking is particularly important for identifying the nature (origins and provenance) of varieties” (Tagliamonte 2006: 242); parallels in constraint ranking across languages can indeed reveal similarities in their grammars, thus providing clues for detecting language contact phenomena.

Finally, the book concludes with a chapter on a rather controversial issue: whether code-switching leads to convergence or convergence leads to code-switching (different theoretical standpoints can be found in the literature; see e.g. Treffers-Daller 2009). Zabrodskaja (77–106) shows how code-switching, triggered by internationalisms and bilingual homophones, promotes structural convergence of Estonian Russian towards Estonian (see for instance the case of code-switching within Russian genitive constructions, which categorically follow the Estonian word order); at the same time, she argues that such a decrease in structural distance can in turn activate code-switching (“overlapping syntax can act as a secondary facilitator”, 102), resulting in a kind of ‘snowball effect’ (cf. Thomason 2001: 1645).

In conclusion, all the papers contained in this book have the merit of being both empirically grounded and theoretically oriented; indeed, they combine an accurate analysis of fieldwork material with a strong emphasis on theoretical issues. The book as a whole provides an extremely thought-provoking account of the role of contact and variation in language change; it makes its own theoretical and methodological contribution to the advancement of both contact linguistics and variationist sociolinguistics, and does succeed in integrating these two traditionally independent fields. The foundation for a promising line of research has hence been laid.

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References


