Bilingualism and multilingualism, i.e. situations where two or more languages are in contact, have a long tradition in many parts of the world. In the book reviewed here, the focus is not on individual bilingualism, but on bilingualism of a speech community. Hence, societal bilingualism, as one type of bilingualism, means that there are two (or more) languages spoken within one community (Appel and Muysken, 2005: 1). We can differentiate between different forms of societal bilingualism. One form, typically found in former colonial countries, consists of two monolingual groups that are located in one area (Appel and Muysken, 2005: 1). A community that consists of bilingual people, i.e. people that have command of at least two languages, can be defined as another form of societal bilingualism. Areas that have a long bilingual or multilingual tradition of the latter type are, for instance, India and many African countries (Appel and Muysken, 2005: 2).

However, as of today, bilingualism is not any longer limited to these contexts, but can increasingly be found in modern, western, industrialized countries (Appel and Muysken, 2005: 4). Migration movements and advances in technology and transportation can be considered key factors that bring people of different backgrounds into contact with each other. This growth of bilingualism around the world has also had an impact on linguistic research: language contact and bilingualism is an expanding area of research and numerous studies have recently been published (see Hickey, 2010 for an overview).

A prevalent and ongoing controversy is whether bilingualism necessarily leads to changes in the grammatical systems or in one of the two systems. This can be captured by the notion of contact-induced change. Thomason (2010: 32) provides a definition of this concept, stating that “[c]ontact is a source of linguistic change if it is less likely that a particular change would have happened outside a specific contact situation.” This implies that we must disentangle external influence from internal developments in order to decide whether change is due to contact. Furthermore, languages in general are characterized by internal variation and variability. To find variation in speech does not necessarily mean that this is language change, as is proposed by Weinreich et al. (1968: 188): “not all variability and heterogeneity in language structure involves change.” This is not only true for monolingual speech, but holds for bilingual speech as well. What we find, essentially, is the difficulty of distinguishing change from internal variation and also to discriminate between contact-induced change and internally induced change.
There seems to be general agreement that contact-induced change happens more easily on a lexical level or in sound production and that grammar is less likely to be affected (Sankoff, 2002: 658). For a long time, it was even believed that grammar is resistant to change due to contact with another language; yet, more recent studies have demonstrated that this view cannot be maintained (see Heine and Kuteva, 2005: 1). It rather appears that all kinds of language structures can be copied into another language via “grammatical replication” (Heine and Kuteva, 2005: 1–2). Perhaps among the most excessively researched phenomena of contact-induced change in bilingual settings is the case of heightened frequency of an existing option or alternative choice. A prominent example, and this will be of relevance later on, is the analysis of the use, or more precisely the boosting, of subject pronoun expression in pro-drop languages that are in contact with non-pro-drop languages (see for example Bayley and Pease-Alvarez, 1997; Flores-Ferrán, 2004; Silva-Corvalán, 1982, 1993).

An additional problem that is often discussed in this research area is the influence of code-switching on language change. Code-switching is known to play a central role in bilingual speech; it is by no means an isolated or rare phenomenon (Appel and Muysken, 2005: 117). Bilinguals switch quite frequently and naturally from one language to the other, both between or within sentences (Appel and Muysken, 2005: 80). Some argue that code-switching fosters grammatical change in bilingual contact situations (see Torres Cacoullos and Travis, 2016: 1 for an overview); yet, others have shown that up until now, little evidence for code-switching having an effect on contact-induced change has been put forward (see Poplack and Levey, 2010; Torres Cacoullos and Travis, 2016).

The major issue that is responsible for these controversies and diverse research findings is the paucity of useful language data that suffices to quantify former claims. This is precisely what underpins the significance of Torres Cacoullos and Travis’ (2018) study. What they try to overcome is “the proliferation of claims of contact-induced change in the growing number of articles, books, and conferences on bilingualism, despite which scholarly consensus remains elusive” (Torres Cacoullos and Travis, 2018: 9). According to the authors, most studies are based on meager data and non-uniform standards of analysis. With their rich data, Torres Cacoullos and Travis set new standards in the study of language contact and they significantly contribute to the understanding of contact-induced language change.

The book begins with an introduction to the field of language contact and its current controversies and states the overall theme of the study: “Does bilinguals’ use of two languages inevitably bring about grammatical change? Is code-switching a catalyst for such change?” (Torres Cacoullos and Travis, 2018: 1). The notion of contact-induced change as something that has manifested as
a regular pattern in a community due to language contact is contrasted with the concept of internal linguistic variation and the concept of cross-linguistic tendencies. In order to clearly differentiate between the former and the latter, Torres Cacoullos and Travis propose a benchmark of comparison: the two bilingual varieties, here Spanish and English, spoken by New Mexican English-Spanish bilinguals, are at the center of the analysis. Change in Spanish will be traced by a comparison with an earlier variety of Spanish of the same bilingual context. The next step compares both bilingual varieties, Spanish and English, with non-contact varieties, hence, with two monolingual benchmarks. This measure is necessary to assess the similarity between the bilingual varieties and the two monolingual varieties: similarity with the same variety accounts for linguistic continuity, and similarity with the other language supports the hypothesis of contact-induced language change. Following this assessment, the most insightful comparison is between the two bilingual varieties. It may answer whether the bilingual speakers blend their grammars or whether they keep them distinct. The last stage contrasts code-switching contexts and non-code-switching contexts to answer the second main theme of the book, that is if code-switching promotes change.

In the second chapter, Torres Cacoullos and Travis outline the long-standing bilingual language community of New Mexico in the United States. Following Labov (2007), delimitation of a speech community is essential because bilingual speech practices across communities are not uniform. Furthermore, the necessity of a long-standing community is supported by Thomason (2001), since length of contact is a predictor of convergence, as opposed to recent immigrant settings. In New Mexico, Spanish has been in coexistence with English for over 150 years and it has the role of a minority language that is slowly losing ground. English is considered more prestigious as New Mexican Spanish and also non-local Spanish is valued considerably higher. The 23 women and 17 men that were selected for the corpus are all US born and registered as part of the bilingual Hispanic population. They mainly come from rural areas and their age ranges from 18 to 89 years, with a bias towards older participants. The level of formal education and age matches the overall New Mexican Hispanic population. Following Weinreich (1968: 1), who specifies that “two or more languages will be said to be in contact if they are used alternately by the same person”, the participants of the current study fulfil the criterion in being fluent bilinguals who use both of their languages frequently and who regularly switch languages.

In chapter three, the authors provide a detailed discussion about criteria of bilingual data and set norms and standards that need to be met in order to be useful in language contact research. Speakers’ intuitions about their own
language use have been shown to shift unpredictably towards accepted norms or away from the prestige variety (Labov, 1972: 111), which results in unreliable data. To overcome this, Torres Cacoullos and Travis use sociolinguistic interviews, conducted by trained field-workers that are also bilingual and part of the same speech community, where mostly community specific topics were elicited. They use an orthographic transcription method to optimize searchability and they incorporate conventions from prosodically based transcriptions that enable them to segment speech into intonation units (IU). The New Mexico Spanish-English Bilingual corpus (nmseb) based on natural bilingual interactions consists of 29 hours of transcribed speech that include 98,000 intonation units. NMSEB represents an enormously rich data set for conducting careful quantitative analyses.

Chapter four is dedicated to the profile of the bilingual speakers. To date, apart from some studies (for example Poplack et al., 2012), research investigating contact-induced grammatical change based on large bilingual speech corpora that include spoken material of both languages is missing. In addition, to assess the degree of bilingualism and the amount of contact with the majority language, extralinguistic information that compose sociolinguistic profiles are fundamental. The authors combine three independent measures of degree of contact, i.e. self-reported language preference, self-rated language proficiency, and proportion of Spanish and English clauses produced in the recordings. They use questionnaires, plus an additional content analysis of the recordings to supplement the questionnaire results, to measure the degree of contact objectively. Hence, the bilingual production data of the corpus is enriched by a detailed extralinguistic characterization of the participants.

The following chapter revisits the well-known and extensively researched area of subject pronoun use in Spanish and explains variability and constraints on subject pronoun expression. This chapter deals with monolingual Spanish subject pronoun expression and represents the benchmark that the bilingual variety of New Mexican Spanish speakers will ultimately be compared to. First, the functions of marking contrast and ambiguity resolution were demonstrated to be particularly infrequent. Most robust for determining subject pronoun expression are subject continuity and priming. Pronouns are favored in greater distance from previous mentions especially when there is a human intervening subject. This is in agreement with the general tendency of less accessible items to require more linguistic material (see Givón, 1983: 18). Accessibility interacts with priming, the other main predictor; pronominal expression is favored when the preceding subject is expressed in pronominal form. This also conforms to structural priming in speech: the choice of one option over
another is influenced by the last choice made by the speaker (see for example Scherre and Naro, 1991; Weiner and Labov, 1983). Further variables that shape absence or presence of subject pronouns are clause type, aspect, dynamic verbs, grammatical person, and certain frequent conventionalized unit such as (yo) creo ‘I think’ and quotative decir ‘say’. Overall, Spanish subject expression shows tendencies found cross-linguistically that can be explained based on general cognitive patterns as well as discourse usage patterns.

Chapter six outlines subject expression in English from a cross-language perspective. This will serve as the reference point to assess whether there are tendencies in the bilingual Spanish production that can be traced back to features of pronominal subject expression in English. To eliminate common cross-linguistic tendencies of change, interlingual differences in the monolingual varieties need to be analyzed. It is possible to assess variability within each language and to establish cross-language comparisons. Torres Cacoullos and Travis build on the variationist comparative method (see Poplack and Meechan, 1998) and extend this idea to what they call variationist typology (see Trudgill 2011 and Siemund 2018 for similar approaches). For this comparison they use conversational data from two comparable corpora: the Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English (sbcsae) (Du Bois et al., 2000–2005) and the Corpus of Conversational Colombian Spanish (cccs) (Travis, 2005). English, classified as a non-null-subject language, still allows unexpressed subjects; however, they only occur infrequently in comparison to Spanish (approx. 3% in English versus approx. 60% in Spanish). Yet, different rates of pronoun expression do not automatically mean that the patterns of variation between the languages are fundamentally different. Torres Cacoullos and Travis show that the inverse is also the case: unexpressed subject pronouns are favored, for instance, when they are connected to a prior coreferential subject, when the previous subject is not expressed either, and when they occur with dynamic verbs; these trends are shared by both English and Spanish. The restriction that unexpressed subject pronouns only occur in intonation unit-initial position represents the opposite scenario, for example. This is unique to English and not even a preference in Spanish. The detailed comparison of the authors yields both similarities and diagnostic differences between Spanish and English. These represent the basis for defining criteria for contact-induced change.

The seventh chapter offers a method of assessing whether the hypothesis of contact-induced change in bilingual speech can be supported or refuted. Torres Cacoullos and Travis use two types of comparisons for the usage of first and third person singular subjects: (i) spoken data from the nmseb corpus versus speech samples of an earlier variety of New Mexico bilinguals, and
(ii) spoken data from the bilingual Spanish variety versus two monolingual varieties (Spanish spoken in San Juan and Madrid). The first comparison does not support change: patterns of subject pronouns in both bilingual varieties are comparable. The second comparison also supports continuity and does not disclose differences between the monolingual benchmarks and the direction of effects found in the bilingual data.

In chapter 8, the question of whether the two bilingual varieties English and Spanish show convergence is addressed by adding comparisons of a monolingual English benchmark and of the bilingual English to the former analyses. Since this step is not usually undertaken in comparable research, it is another strength of Torres Cacoullos and Travis’ study. What the authors demonstrate is that each comparison they perform produces the same result: “bilinguals’ Spanish aligns with monolingual Spanish and their English with monolingual English” (Torres Cacoullos and Travis, 2018: 172). This shows that the bilingual speakers have two distinct grammars.

The last missing investigation is presented in chapter 9. Torres Cacoullos and Travis resume the popular argument that code-switching promotes convergence (see Gumperz and Wilson, 1971). In the bilingual community of New Mexico, code-switching has been shown to be used as a discourse device and could be referred to as occurring “intrasituational” (Poplack, 2015: 918), which makes this community especially valuable for this type of comparison. The authors differentiate between multi-word code-switches and single word insertions from another language. The latter, i.e. borrowings, behave differently than code-switches (see Poplack, 2015: 923). Therefore, Torres Cacoullos and Travis limit their analysis to multi-word code-switches. In addition, they use a clausal measure of code-switching proximity. They focus on “maximally proximate” code-switches (Torres Cacoullos and Travis, 2018: 180), i.e. multi-word insertions that appear in the same clause or in the previous clause as the target verb of the other language. The outcome of the comparison reveals that immediacy of English does not influence the rate or the pattern of the expression of Spanish subject pronouns. Again, the authors do not find support for convergence of the two grammatical systems.

Chapter 10, an extension of the former chapter, analyses priming in connection with code-switching and explores the associations between the two grammars of the bilingual speakers. Torres Cacoullos and Travis return to the notion of priming and emphasize that speakers’ choices in discourse are not independent but depend on previous choices. What we can find in code-switching contexts is “cross-language structural priming” (Torres Cacoullos and Travis, 2018: 190). They observe that priming across languages is possible, which suggests that there is an interconnection between subject pronouns in Spanish and English. However, within-language priming is stronger.
than cross-language priming. This supports the non-convergence hypothesis; even in code-switching contexts, the bilingual speakers keep their grammars separate.

The final chapter summarizes the main findings of this comprehensive study. Torres Cacoullos and Travis highlight that (i) contact-induced grammatical change is not a matter of course and that (ii) code-switching does not promote grammatical change. Based on a large Spanish-English bilingual corpus, they demonstrate that the two grammars of a bilingual speaker are indeed interconnected. Though, they are not blended or mixed but maintained independent even in code-switching contexts.

Torres Cacoullos and Travis’ well-written work convinces with its transparent and detailed style of analyzing contact-induced change in a bilingual community. By critically examining previous research and by including more detailed methods and comparisons that go beyond the scope of earlier studies, they overcome frequent misconceptions and are able to set a new direction in language contact research. Their careful corpus compilation warrants a fine-grained analysis of naturally occurring bilingual speech. The authors illustrate their claims with numerous examples and accentuate their findings with informative tables and graphs. The introductory character of this volume and the frequent contextualizations and summaries make this book a useful resource not only for experts in language contact but also for students and early career researchers.

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Literature


