In this article, we discuss the borrowing of morphology from Spanish by three unrelated and typologically different American-Indian languages: Quechua, Guarani and Otomi. On the basis of three corpora of spontaneous speech produced by a sizeable number of informants, we will suggest that there are strong constraints on the transfer of bound morphemes from a model language to a basic language in a contact situation. Although all three languages borrow lexical material from Spanish at a rather large scale, from different parts of speech, including several grammatical ones, few native forms receive Spanish morphological marking. On the other hand, borrowed forms may enter the languages with different kinds of Spanish affixes. These ‘Trojan horses’ may be paving the road to their eventual use with native lexemes.

1 Introduction

In the literature on language contact, a number of claims have been made with respect to what can and what cannot be borrowed, and also the order in which elements would be integrated in the lexicon and the grammar of the borrowing language. On the one hand, the position has been that there would be considerable constraints on borrowing. Particularly in earlier work on language typology, it has been assumed that borrowing follows the lines of universal implications of the Greenbergian (1963) type, and that there would be universals of borrowing similar to the universals of grammar. E.g. elements would be borrowed along with their syntactic make-up. Thus, a postpositional language would not borrow prepositions, nor would a prepositional language borrow postpositions (cf. Moravcsik 1978). Typically, hierarchies are proposed in that line of work with respect to the order in which elements of the respective parts of speech in the model language (ML) may make their way into the basic language (BL) in a contact situation. In very general terms, lexical material, such as nouns
and verbs, is supposed to be borrowed before grammatical material, such as adpositions and articles. Free morphemes would appear before bound ones. Within the lexical domain, ML nouns are supposed to appear with some regularity in BL before elements of other classes will appear. And in the realm of morphology, it has already been observed by Weinreich (1953) that the ease of borrowing of morphemes would be negatively correlated with their level of embeddedness. Correspondingly, derivational elements would transfer before inflectional elements would be borrowed. Early versions of such hierarchies have been criticized on details, and more refined proposals have been made since (cf. Thomason and Kaufmann 1988, 74f; Thomason 2001, 70f; and Winford 2003). Some authors, on the other hand, find no evidence for the assumption that linguistic borrowing would be subject to some very general, neatly organized patterns, principles, and hierarchies. Notably, Campbell (1993) rejects the idea that there would exist interdependencies between the borrowing of elements from different linguistic categories and levels at all. He presents counterexamples to most of the universals presented in Moravcsik (1978), and assumes a type of ‘anything goes’ position, where it is mainly non-linguistic factors that determine what is and what is not borrowed. More specifically, Campbell sees no logical relationship between the borrowing of derivational versus inflectional material and processes.

Our aim with this article is to contribute to this discussion. Our position, as discussed earlier in Bakker et al. (2008), is much like the one taken by Campbell (1993). Indeed, we think that the main motivation for a group of bilingual speakers to introduce elements from one language—typically their L2—into their discourse in the other language—typically their L1—should be sought outside the two language systems proper, and rather in the domain of everyday language use. Differences in borrowing behaviour between the speakers of two ML > BL pairs should then be explained primarily on the basis of differences of a pragmatic or socio-linguistic nature rather than differences between the respective language systems as such. However, unlike Campbell, we think that the characteristics of the lexicons and grammars of the two languages involved in a contact situation do play a role as well, be it a relatively modest one. Thus, rather than providing arguments for borrowing, we assume that the typology of the two systems-in-contact create a potential set of constraints on the borrowing process, which might make certain transfers easy while making others more difficult or even unlikely. These constraints are language pair specific, but certain patterns might emerge from a large collection of empirical material observed over a number of different contact