Chamoreau, Claudine, and Isabelle Léglise, eds.


The volume under review is a collection of papers on morphosyntactic variation and change in settings involving language contact. The editors pursue three main goals, namely, first, to provide a set of linguistic data never discussed before; second, to adopt a cross-linguistic and cross-dialectal perspective; and third, to show that a holistic approach to Contact-Induced Language Change (henceforth cilc) is preferable to approaches focusing only on either linguistic or social factors (p. 13). Thus, the general aim of the volume is to elucidate the facts of language change from a multi-faceted and dynamic perspective.

While the intended cross-linguistic orientation of the volume is quite well reflected in the variety of languages discussed, the geo-linguistic sample is rather imbalanced, with Latin America and Europe being visibly overrepresented. This, however, is not a deficiency since the volume’s orientation is not quantitative in nature, but explicitly qualitative, with its interest in developing a meticulous discussion of contact-induced phenomena—indeed independently pursued by each article—along the lines of three main thrusts of interest of current research on CILC. These are (1) the role of multilingual speakers and settings; (2) the continuum between phenomena of cilc and phenomena ascribable to language decay; and (3) the interplay of externally and internally motivated language change.

The book includes thirteen articles (1–375), an author index (377–383), a language index (384–389), and a subject index (390–393). Following the editors’ introductory article, the volume is opened up by Yaron Matras, who ably summarizes the activity-oriented approach to cilc that he has been developing since the late 1990s, based on the understanding of language as the practice of communicative interaction, organized at the level of discourse, rather than in terms of a system. Accordingly, Matras claims that contact phenomena “are the product of language-processing in goal-oriented communicative interaction” (p. 22) and enable, rather than interfere with, communicative activity. The multilingual speaker—he claims—has a more complex repertoire of communicative structures than the monolingual speaker, and s/he is keen to exploit it in its entirety; on the other hand, s/he is required to select the options that are contextually appropriate and to discard those that are not, on the basis of a ‘selection and inhibition mechanism’. However, especially in situations of distress, fatigue, or confusion, the monitoring procedure may fail to work properly, resulting in ‘selection malfunctions’. Selection malfunctions
determine non-conscious innovations, which, after frequent occurrence, may become stabilized, first at the idiolectal level, and later, propagate among a group of individuals via pattern-replication. Selection malfunctions and pattern-replication are the first two steps of a continuum of contact-induced creativity and innovation, which also embraces the more conscious steps of lexical insertion and deliberate language manipulation. While Matras provides an elegant overview of his approach to language contact, enriched chiefly by data on both bilingual speakers and minority languages, such as Domari, from his own fieldwork, the external (psycholinguistic and experimental) evidence on which his claims are founded remains undisclosed.

In the second paper, Claudine Chamoreau presents an instance of CILC in the domain of comparative constructions of superiority found in Purepecha, an endangered language isolate spoken in Mexico. Based on novel data from her own fieldwork, Chamoreau details the four main types of comparative constructions in Purepecha: the particle type; the particle type with locative phrase; the mixed coordination and particle type; and the applicative type. By comparing them with comparative constructions both in the pre-contact recipient language, Lengua de Michoacan, and in the contact language Spanish, with which Purepecha has stood in contact for nearly five centuries, Chamoreau convincingly demonstrates that one subtype of the ‘particle type with locative phrase’ constitutes an innovation. It consists of the degree marker mas (Spanish más) and the relator que, followed by the Spanish-borrowed entre, as in (1) (p. 68):

(1) Pedro mas sesi-e-s- ti ke entre Xwanu
Pedro more good-PRED-AOR-ASS3 than between Xwanu
‘Pedro is better than Xwanu’

As a matter of fact, this construction deviates from both the comparative patterns in Spanish and the use of entre in Spanish as a locative preposition meaning ‘between’. Chamoreau links this instance of creative borrowing with a cross-linguistic tendency “to connect comparison with location and to express comparison through the locative type” (p. 70), a hypothesis which seems pertinent and whose investigation is worth being pursued in more detail in separate publications.

In the ensuing article, Alexandra Aikhenvald investigates various aspects of language obsolescence relating to language contact. Presenting data on globally obsolescent languages, largely drawn from her own fieldwork on Manambu, Tariana, and Bare, but also covering Mawayana, Resigaro, and other languages, Aikhenvald masterfully shows that in qualitative terms, “the effects [of obsolescence] are the same as may have occurred in language contact of a