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