Language Contact

Language contact occurs when speakers of different languages interact and their languages influence one another. Drawing on the author’s own first-hand observations of child and adult bilingualism, this book combines his original research with an up-to-date introduction to key concepts, to provide a holistic, original theory of contact linguistics. Going beyond a descriptive outline of contact phenomena, it introduces a theory of contact-induced language change, linking structural change to motivations in discourse and language processing. Since the first edition was published, the field has rapidly grown, and this fully revised edition covers all of the most recent developments, making it an invaluable resource for researchers and advanced students in linguistics.

Yaron Matras is Professor of Linguistics at the University of Manchester. He is a leading international authority on contact linguistics, language documentation, and the linguistics of Romani, Domari, and Kurdish, and is the founder of the Multilingual Manchester research unit that specialises in research and public engagement on urban multilingualism and language diversity.
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Language Contact

YARON MATRAS

University of Manchester
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Preface to the Second Edition

In the preface to the first edition of this book, back in 2008, I wrote the following lines: In those very few societies in which monolingualism is the norm, bilinguals are sometimes asked which language they dream in. The answer is, of course, invariably: ‘It depends what or whom we are dreaming about’. That tends to put monolinguals in their place: They show respect for the rhetoric. In fact, the correct answer is that as bilinguals we are unable to keep our languages entirely apart even in our dreams. We may associate certain expressions or phrases with particular events, gestures, or faces, but in our dreams as in our everyday conscious communication we strive for the absolute liberty to use our entire linguistic repertoire freely, with no constraints, and we adore those moments when we can converse with fellow bilinguals who understand and even encourage us to do so. Language contact is about the way we live with the expectation that even our dreams should be monolingual, about how we bypass these restrictions and mix our languages in actual conversation, and about the way in which even monolinguals sometimes end up enriching and reshaping their own form of speech thanks to their interaction with bilingual individuals. This is essentially the idea that is presented, in somewhat more detail, in the following chapters.

A decade has passed since the publication of the first edition, and, partly thanks to the contributions of many other researchers who have taken a similar perspective on these issues as I have, and thanks in part to the growing realisation that today’s globalised world is complex and that it revolves around more than ‘system’ boundaries, much of the research community has in the meantime embraced the idea that bilinguals have ‘repertoires’ rather than strictly defined and clearly demarcated ‘languages’. That realisation has been expressed by some through use of terms such as ‘translanguaging’, ‘heteroglossia’, or ‘metrolinguism’, introducing a touch of postmodernist thinking into linguistic theory: In the age of increasing multilingualism in urban centres, the usefulness and purposefulness of viewing language as confined to its structure diminishes, as users of language have endless opportunities to cross structural demarcation lines and blend items as a way of performing their identity. What has actually changed, of course, is not the reality of communication in multilingual contexts, but merely the fact that global communications, mobility, and the growing super-diversity of Western cities has finally brought that reality to the attention of a larger population of researchers, and of practitioners in sectors such as education and public services. And so now, more than ever before, we need a theory that addresses this
reality, and that makes the connections between usage in multilingual contexts and conversations, and the longer-term modifications that linguistic structures undergo over time as a result of such multilingual encounters.

I feel fortunate to have been raised in a multilingual environment and in a multilingual family, and I owe many of the insights that I am able to present here as my own to the stimulating and compelling circumstances that allowed me to participate, observe, and reflect on the way individuals and societies practice language contact. I am also privileged to have had the opportunity, over the years, and in preparation of the first edition of this book, to discuss issues of language contact at the professional level with many colleagues and friends, among them Greg Anderson, Peter Auer, Ad Backus, Peter Bakker, Giuliano Bernini, Walter Bisang, Simone Bol, David Bradley, Kate Burridge, Michael Clyne, Bernard Comrie, Bill Croft, Eva Csató, Christina Eira, Viktor Elšík, Patty Epps, Marcel Erdal, Nick Evans, Dan Everett, Jonathan Fine, Victor Friedman, Friedel Frohwein, David Gil, Eitan Grossman, Dieter Halwachs, Ian Hancock, Martin Haspelmath, Bernd Heine, Peter Hendriks, Kees Hengeveld, Kristine Hildebrandt, Lars Johanson, František Kratochvíl, Masha Koptjevskaja-Tamm, Tanya Kuteva, Patrick McConvell, April McMahon, Felicity Meakins, Miriam Meyerhoff, Marianne Mithun, Pieter Muysken, Carol Myers-Scotton, Johana Nichols, Shana Poplack, Mark Post, Carmel O’Shannessy, Angelika Redder, Gertrud Reershemiüs, Jochen Rehbein, Jeanette Sakel, Eva Schulze-Berndt, Zdeněk Starý, Thomas Stolz, Uri Tadmor, Johan van der Auwera, Peter Wagner, and Debra Ziegeler; my thanks to all of them.

My students and collaborators in the Manchester Working Group on Language Contact have been a precious source of inspiration. For many hours of thought-provoking discussion I wish to thank Asma Al-Baluchi, Adele Chadwick, Claire Chen, Veliyana Chileva, Andrea Donakey, Francesco Goglia, Lucy Hottmann, Heveen Ali Kurdı, Sandy Lo, Mohamed Fathi Osman, Barbara Schrammel, Veronica Schulman, Maryam Shabibi, Ellen Smith, Declan Sweeney, Anton Tenser, Anne-Marie Thomson, and Şirin Tufan.

Some of the data included in this book and some of the ideas discussed here are, directly or indirectly, products of a series of externally funded projects carried out at the University of Manchester. I am grateful to the Arts and Humanities Research Council for funding some of my research on Mixed Languages and on Language Convergence and Linguistic Areas, to the Economic and Social Research Council, the Arts and Humanities Research Council, and the Open Society Institute for funding my research on Romani, to the British Academy for support for my research on Domari as well as the creation of a digital archive of recordings of endangered languages, and to the Special Research Area on Cultural and Linguistic Contacts in North Africa and Western Asia at the University of Mainz (SFB 295) for sponsoring my fieldwork on a number of languages. For technical support and assistance with the collection, processing, and archiving of data and data sources I thank Viktor Elšík, Barbara Schrammel, Jeannete Sakel, Christa Schubert, Charlotte Jones, Ruth Hill,
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Hazel Gardner, Chris White, Veronica Schulman, and Anthony Grant, who worked with me on these projects, as well as Martin Nissen, Dörte Hansen-Jaax, Dunja Rösteholm, Nellie Weiss, Mi’assar Sleem, Moshe Dafan, Greta Johansen, and many others who have provided interviews, shared data, or helped gloss and translate examples. I am deeply grateful to my colleagues in Linguistics and English Language at the School of Arts, Languages, and Cultures of the University of Manchester for their support and enthusiasm, which allowed Manchester to become a thriving centre for discussions on language contact and urban multilingualism.

During the preparation of the first edition of the book I benefited from audiences’ comments in reaction to invited keynote addresses at the Annual Meeting of the Linguistics Association of Great Britain in Roehampton and at the Workshop on Language Variation and Contact-Induced Language Change at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Linguistic Typology in Paris, as well as from reactions to seminar presentations at the Max Planck Institute in Leipzig, at the universities of Cologne, Düsseldorf, Hamburg, York, Jerusalem, Prague, Melbourne, and Sydney, and at the Australian National University in Canberra and the Research Centre for Linguistic Typology at La Trobe University, Melbourne. I began writing the book during a research visit at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig, in the spring of 2004, and I am grateful to Bernard Comrie and Martin Haspelmath for facilitating my stay there. I completed the manuscript in 2007 during my stay as International Linkage Fellow sponsored by the Australian Research Council and as Distinguished Fellow of the Institute for Advanced Studies at the Research Centre for Linguistic Typology at La Trobe University, Melbourne, by invitation of Sasha Aikhenvald and Bob Dixon.

In preparing the second edition of the book I benefited enormously from meticulous comments from several anonymous reviewers, and I thank them for the dedication and detail with which they approached the task. I am also grateful to Jacomine Nortier and her students, to Peter Bakker, and to Viktor Leggio, for comments on previous chapters and draft additions; as well as to numerous audiences that provided feedback on the content of the book at lectures around the world, from Berkeley to Sydney, Moscow to Pune, Berlin to Istanbul, Jerusalem to Singapore. I have also benefited from the insights of a further generation of students, some of whose work I cite in this edition, and from the discussions and public-engagement activities of the Multilingual Manchester research unit, which I founded at the University of Manchester in 2009, just as the first edition saw the light of day.

One of my reviewers was critical of the functional approach and was of the opinion that I should scrap that particular aspect of the book and take instead what was described as an ‘historical’ perspective. I respect that viewpoint, but it reinforces my desire to persuade readers that language contact is more than the listing of historical facts. It is, in my opinion, a window towards exploring the deeper functionality of linguistic structures as a faculty that is designed through
natural evolution to allow us to communicate. It is the role that particular structural categories play in communication and the way that we plan and monitor communication in everyday conversation that make those categories more or less prone to change in multilingual settings, just as much as the extralinguistic values that we attribute to entire sets of structures. That is the reason why this book seeks to offer not just a description of facts, but a theory that can provide an explanatory account of those facts. That is also the reason why in this edition I have chosen to develop further a core idea that I mentioned just casually in the concluding remarks to the earlier one, now including a new section on language contact and the evolution of human language capacity, adding my bit from the contact-linguistic perspective to the many other speculative contributions on the subject.

Of course facts remain the basis of the argument, and I have done my best to include a selection of examples to illustrate the range of contact phenomena and the ideas and interpretations that surround them, both from published sources and from my own observations on language contact settings. Naturally, drawing heavily on first-hand data limits the choice of languages and settings; but I find it important to be able to justify arguments with data that I have collected myself and where I am as confident as one might be with regard to the constraints of the setting, the structures, the communicative intentions and the sociolinguistic make-up that shapes the individual speech events and extracts that I discuss as examples. Such example utterances in more than a dozen languages come from my own archive of recorded data.

The ideas expressed in this book are grounded not just in the experience of language contact, but also in a general appreciation of what language is. I owe an immeasurable debt of gratitude to my teacher Jochen Rehbein, who, more than anyone, prompted me to reflect critically on the meaning of categorisations, labels, and models in linguistics, to search for the inner function of linguistic forms in the very purpose of linguistic activities, and to appreciate, unapologetically, the broad range of human communicative activities as an integrated whole and as the key to the study of the language faculty. I feel that his years of guidance and inspiration have shaped my approach to the following chapters even more than they had influenced some of my earlier work, and I therefore chose to dedicate this book to him.

Last but certainly not least, my love and very special thanks to Tom, for being the most wonderful ‘Ben’ that he is, and for always helping me see the world in full colour.
## Abbreviations

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