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## LANGUAGE CONTACT

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Languages have been in contact with one another throughout human history. Different groups of people come into contact due to various circumstances, and the nature of that contact heavily influences the effects on the language(s) spoken by those groups, in cases where they speak different languages or, perhaps, different dialects (Holm 2004; Mufwene 2001; Thomason 2001; Winford 2003). Since at least 5,000 languages are spoken around the world today and since there are only about 250 countries, language contact is a normal part of our existence as human beings.

The chapters in this book deal with languages involved in three types of language contact. Immediately below, we present some brief remarks about the languages considered in this book, and then we discuss the different types of contact. (We do not include in this chapter contact phenomena not relating directly to this book's language chapters. For a more general discussion of language contact, see Thomason 2001 and Winford 2003.)

First, several chapters deal with new languages (creoles formed in the last 350 years or so). Creoles are dealt with in the chapters that discuss Jamaican (Patwa), Haitian Creole, and Louisiana Creole.

### **NEW LANGUAGES: PIDGINS AND CREOLES**

We use the expression **new languages** to refer to cases in which brand-new languages emerge, partially made up of languages that have come into contact but also with their own new, unique grammatical features. This term is mostly used for pidgins or creoles. A **pidgin** language results from a relatively abrupt process of new-language formation, typically caused by speakers without a common language having to communicate. The process is abrupt relative to, say, the

formation process for the development of French out of Latin. Pidgins come into existence with grammars simpler than those of the languages they are most closely related to and with a reduced range of social contexts in which they are used. The grammar of a pidgin is stable enough that it can be recognized as a speech form in its own right, different from the input languages. A pidgin becomes a creole when a community begins speaking it as a native language. Not all creoles, however, develop from (grammatically stable) pidgins. That is, none of the speech forms leading to the birth of such creoles are stable enough to qualify as a pidgin.

The second group of this book's languages for which language contact phenomena are important are African American English (AAE), Chicano English, Southwest (U.S.) Spanish, Dominican (U.S.) Spanish, and Louisiana, or Cajun, French. These are language varieties whose distinctive nature, compared to other varieties of the same language, stems from their presence over an extended period in a more intense language contact situation.

AAE is described in some current work on contact linguistics as partially restructured grammatically due to language contact. In other work it is described as the result of group second-language acquisition, that is, language shift—dropping one language over time while adopting another. Both ways of describing AAE get at the fact that, in the process of acquiring English, the early African Americans' creole and West African languages significantly influenced the variety of English that they created—AAE. Many of these influences can still be seen in current AAE, which has some grammatical features in common with a number of creole languages. (See the chapters on AAE and the vernacular dialects of English for examples.)

In the case of Chicano English, the contact brought together English and Mexican/Chicano Spanish (see Carmen Fought's and MaryEllen Garcia's chapters). In the case of Southwest Spanish, the contact was between the same languages, but the chapter zeroes in on how the contact affected Spanish (see MaryEllen Garcia's chapter). The chapter on Dominican Spanish presents a different contact situation for this variety of Spanish, which arrived in the U.S. much more recently. Michael D. Picone's chapter looks at how contact with U.S. English has affected Cajun French, which was transported to Louisiana with the forced exile from (Arcadia) Canada in the eighteenth century of the people who came to be known as Cajuns. One of the most obvious contact-related features of these languages is borrowing from the language with which they are in contact. Another salient feature involves both of the languages in the contact situation: codeswitching, switching back and forth between the languages in the contact situation (for example, between Southwest Spanish and English).

The third group of languages affected by language contact phenomena includes indigenous ones such as Mandan, Shoshoni, and Navajo, as well as Louisiana (Cajun) French, which in the U.S. are in danger of dying out under pressure from the economically and politically powerful language English. (Please see the Shoshoni chapter in regard to the spellings *Shoshoni* vs. *Shoshone*.)

Mandan has only a small number of fluent speakers left. While Shoshoni speakers number in the thousands, very few children are currently acquiring the language in the home. However, there are a number of maintenance and revitalization programs, which include teaching Shoshoni as a second language in many tribal community centers and at three public and two tribal schools in Idaho, Utah, and Nevada. Idaho State University as well as the University of Utah have been offering credit-bearing Shoshoni language courses for a number of years.

Navajo has the largest number of speakers of any U.S. indigenous language, but currently very few children have Navajo as their mother tongue. It is still a strong language, but once a language ceases to have young native speakers, measures must be taken to ensure its long-term survival. Fortunately, a number of revitalization programs are already under way for Navajo.

## Language versus Dialect

From your other reading in linguistics, you are aware of the distinction between the terms *language* and *dialect*. Dialects show differences in everything from pronunciation and vocabulary to morphology, syntax, and semantics. Although we cannot always determine where one language stops and another begins, even a person without linguistic training recognizes that there are different ways (dialects) of speaking the same way (language)—so to speak. For example, there are different dialects of English in Britain, the U.S., and Australia. A number of chapters in this book focus on dialects of English (vernacular dialects of English, AAE, and Chicano English), Spanish (Southwest Spanish and Dominican Spanish), French (Cajun French and other varieties of French in Louisiana), and Chinese. (The chapter on Chinese presents the rationale for referring to the varieties of Chinese as dialects of one language.)

### DIALECT, STANDARD, AND LANGUAGE VARIETY

In some language-study traditions, especially in Europe, a dialect is an unwritten, historically related form of a national standard variety, and the term may carry a negative connotation. **Dialect**, as used by linguists, is simply a particular form of a language, standard or nonstandard. (The **standard** is the dialect described in grammar books and dictionaries and used in education, government, and other mainstream settings.) *Dialect* is used in a totally nonjudgmental sense in linguistics. The term *dialect* focuses more narrowly than the term *language*. Frequently, the term *language variety* or **variety** is used instead of the term *language* or *dialect* to refer to any level of generalization with regard to speech forms.

Everyone speaks a dialect—of some language. Everyone also speaks a language. Again, the use of one term or the other has to do with focusing narrowly or more

broadly. We often find a linguistic continuum, such as that in northwestern Europe, where dialects of Dutch, Flemish (in Belgium), and German gradually change into other dialects as one travels farther and farther away from a given point.

Dialects of the same language, for example, dialects of English, are often mutually intelligible but not always. There are various social, cultural, historical, psychological, and also linguistic factors that may interfere with mutual intelligibility. Repeated exposure to a grammatically distant dialect typically increases one's ability to understand it.

In some cases, language varieties that are mutually intelligible may be treated as separate languages. This is the case with some of the Numic languages of the Great Basin, the region of the U.S. east of the Rocky Mountains and west of the Sierra Nevadas. For example, the mutually intelligible varieties Shoshoni and Gosiute have distinct names and have sometimes been treated as separate languages in some official situations, although linguists, and most speakers, lump them together as dialects of one language, Shoshoni. On the other hand, linguists usually treat Shoshoni and Comanche as separate languages while native speakers of Shoshoni say they understand Comanche.

### NUMIC LANGUAGES AND LANGUAGE FAMILY

**Numic languages** are languages of the northernmost branch of the Uto-Aztecan language family such as Shoshoni, Comanche, Northern Paiute, and Ute. Uto-Aztecan languages are still spoken from northern Idaho and Wyoming to Central America. The best-known, and currently largest, language of the family is Nahuatl, the language of the Aztecs. It is spoken in southern Mexico and by some Mexican immigrants in the U.S.

The term **language family** refers to a group of languages with one common ancestor. Their common ancestry is reflected in lexical similarities and, crucially, in systematic (phonological, morphological, and/or syntactic) structural similarities.

In sum, there are no set linguistic criteria for dividing up the world's language varieties into languages and dividing each language into its various dialects. Often linguistic factors are helpful, but just as often we find that political, social, historical, and psychological factors are important too. Because of these considerations, estimates of the languages spoken in the world today range between 5,000 and 7,000; the number depends on whether a particular variety is counted as a separate language or as a dialect of another language.

The unit of analysis for language contact is the speech community. A speech community may be defined narrowly or broadly. It sometimes involves a village, a large city, a nation, or even a multinational region. A speech community may also be defined on the basis of socially salient groups based on, for example, gender, ethnicity, race, and other types of social and personal identities.

## **SPEECH COMMUNITY AND LANGUAGE USE**

**Speech community** is defined as a community whose members

1. usually share at least one language variety
2. share rules for language use and the evaluation of speech

**Language use** involves what is also called “communicative practices” or “ways of speaking.”

## **Outcomes of Language Contact**

We can speak of language contact in terms of

1. the way it affects and changes a speech community overall and, especially, the way it affects the survival of the languages in contact,
2. the way it affects the languages in contact, and
3. the new languages that it sometimes creates.

## ***Changes in the Speech Community***

The most obvious way that language contact can affect and change a speech community is by leading to bilingualism, which may involve two first languages or a first language and a second language. Bilingualism is a question of degree: a person may not speak both languages (or all the languages, in the case of multilingualism) equally well, especially if one of the languages is a second language. Additionally, we have to distinguish between individual bilingualism and societal bilingualism. The latter exists when bilingualism is widespread in the community, a fairly common situation in the world today. Bilingualism on the societal level—a metropolitan community, a state, or a group of states in the U.S., for example—exists where Southwest Spanish, Dominican Spanish, Cajun French, Louisiana Creole, and Shoshoni are spoken.

## **NATIVE OR FIRST LANGUAGE (L1) AND SECOND LANGUAGE (L2)**

A **native or first language**, or **L1**, is acquired during early childhood, usually by growing up in a social environment where that language is spoken in everyday social interaction. On the other hand, a **second language**, or **L2**, is learned later in life, or perhaps in the classroom or through tutoring at any age. Crucial is that an L1 is acquired early in life and naturally, through everyday social interaction as the learner is enculturated, unlike an L2. Speakers may have more than one L1 and more than one L2.

Thus, in a two-language contact situation, language X (say, Dominican Spanish in New York) may well be some speakers' L1 but an L2 for other speakers.

Societal bilingualism may be stable or transitory. With stable bilingualism, the two languages (or more languages—what we discuss in regard to bilingualism also applies to multilingualism) continue to be spoken in the community instead of one language becoming dominant and eventually triggering the attrition and death of the other language.

The increased use of English was beginning to eclipse Cajun French until recently, when concerted efforts began to promote it, especially in southwestern Louisiana. However, it is still most likely in decline, due to the strong pressure of English. With few speakers, Louisiana Creole is in serious danger of eventually disappearing. It is in much the same situation as the American Indian languages referred to above. Chicano English will probably be with us indefinitely due to the vibrant and growing Chicano communities in the U.S. AAE, an outgrowth of antiblack racial violence and segregation, will no doubt exist as long as an identifiable African American community exists in the U.S. Jamaican (Patwa) remains vibrant in some cities such as New York, due primarily to the continual influx of Jamaican-speaking immigrants. A parallel situation exists with Haitian Creole.

With Spanish as the biggest exception and other exceptions such as Cantonese (Chinese), the languages of immigrants to the U.S. eventually undergo language death, in the sense that there ceases to be an immigrant *community* speaking the language. Over the generations, societal bilingualism in those locales eventually disappears. This has happened with Italian and German, for example. During the course of the second author's (Di Paolo's) life, Abruzzes' Italian has gone from being her only language in her early childhood in a multilingual community in Colorado to being a language that she communicates in for just a few hours a year because most of the fluent speakers she knew have passed away and the remaining bilinguals are more comfortable in English. (Abruzzes' is the name of this dialect, spoken in Abruzzo, a region of Italy. The apostrophe in the spelling represents a reduced vowel.)

Spanish is a special case because, as second- and third-generation descendants of Spanish-speaking immigrants become English monolinguals, they are replaced, so to speak, by new Spanish-speaking immigrants. As a result, Spanish remains a vital language in numerous American communities. Spanish also has a special place in the U.S. because it is a colonial language. Like English, it was the language of the first European settlers in a large part of the U.S. (see the chapter on Southwest Spanish). Colonial languages in the U.S. persist much longer than immigrant languages because they play a special role for members of their speech communities, as Haugen (1956) pointed out over a half century ago.

Societal bilingualism usually atrophies and ultimately disappears in communities where each language does not become functionally distinct. The term *diglossia* is used for societies in which there is bilingualism but in which the languages serve different functions. Under diglossia, there is a high (H) language and a low (L) language, the former used in more public, formal domains such as education, government, and the legal system. The L language, on the other hand, is used in more private, informal social domains involving, for example, the family, friends, and play. While the L language is learned as an L1 (native language), the H language is normally learned at school.

In some diglossic societies, most people, or at least a majority of them, are bilingual in both languages. In other societies, Haiti, for example, there are just a few bilinguals, who speak both Haitian Creole (L) and French (H). The percentage of bilinguals has been estimated as being as low as 5%. Consequently, given that diglossia involves functional differentiation in the languages, in those societies in which there is limited bilingualism, the majority of the population, with little or no access to formal education, is excluded from full participation in public domains, access to which is crucial for furthering and protecting individual and group needs and interests. As noted in the chapter on Haitian, diglossia in Haiti is diminishing due to the officialization of Haitian along with French and its increased use in the H domain.

On a parallel with *bilingualism*, sometimes linguists use the term *bidialectalism* to refer to situations in which two dialects are used. Related to this notion is the fact that many AAE speakers are bidialectal; that is, they speak AAE and some non-AAE variety of English. Likewise, Chicano English or Appalachian English speakers may also be bidialectal, although less is known about their typical linguistic repertoires.

### ***Effects on the Languages' Survival***

In some instances, languages survive language contact but not always. Language maintenance occurs when a group whose language is involved in language contact keeps its language over the long run. In some cases, however, there is language shift, whereby a group adopts a new language, ceasing to use its former language. The latter scenario results in language attrition and then language death.

Nettle and Romaine (2000) estimate that half of the world's current languages are in danger of dying out in this century. They argue that language endangerment, like the extinction of species, is largely driven by the destruction of the world's ecosystems as one dominant economic system spreads and, in the case of languages, results in the loss of cultural and linguistic diversity. Hinton and Hale (2001) paint a more optimistic picture, presenting many examples of successful or at least hopeful cases of language revitalization. (Also see Spears and Hinton [2010] and EMELD [n.d.] for more information on the maintenance and revitalization of endangered languages.)

Many American Indian languages in the U.S. have already suffered attrition and death. There are 175 indigenous languages that survive; and most, perhaps all, are endangered. Attrition can lead to the current situation, in which a number of these languages have only one or a few speakers left. Attrition is normally accompanied by a reduction in the grammatical resources of the language and the social contexts of use. For example, with only a few speakers, the language is no longer used for ceremonial purposes.

Linguists are extremely concerned about today's high rate of language attrition and death worldwide. When we lose a language, we lose an irreplaceable resource that provides a unique way of looking at the world and insight into the human mind. We also lose the opportunity to understand the full range of the grammatical abilities of human beings. And the people who lose their ancestral language lose a crucial connection with their cultural past.

### ***Effects on the Languages in Contact***

As noted, language contact often leads to bilingualism. One of the effects of bilingualism is codeswitching, the incorporation of material from another language into the one being spoken or the alternation between two (or more) languages during the same communicative event. (See the chapters on Southwest Spanish and Cajun French for examples.) Linguists disagree on exactly how to define codeswitching, but they all agree that it involves the use of material from two languages (or even more) within one communicative event. Codeswitching may be intersentential, with one sentence in one language and another in another language, or intrasentential, within one sentence. Within a sentence, it may involve inserting everything from a single morpheme to entire clauses from another language. Observe this example from Spanish-English codeswitching with English in boldface: *Compré este LAPTOP DOWNTOWN* 'I bought this laptop downtown.'

#### **COMMUNICATIVE EVENTS**

Examples of **communicative events** are jokes, conversations, sermons, arguments, classroom discussions, and corporate board meetings.

Codeswitching involves switches between language varieties that are different along the full range of grammar—vocabulary, phonology, morphology, and so on. For switching between dialects of the same language, for example, AAE and a non-AAE variety, linguists sometimes use the term *codeshifting*.

Styleshifting, however, involves variation in the use of two or more possible ways of saying the same thing, often in the same dialect and by the same speaker, and possibly in the same speech event. The different ways of saying the same thing

are called **variants**. Variants used in styleshifting are usually socially marked; that is, using more of one variant instead of another often has social meaning. Speakers styleshift, often unconsciously, for stylistic purposes, usually for speaking more or less formally, but also for signaling in-group membership.

Styleshifting might involve, for example, using *ain't* instead of *isn't*, as in *He ain't here* vs. *He isn't here*. It quite commonly involves phonological variation. For example, speakers of English use the variants [ɪn] and [ɪŋ], different ways of pronouncing the verbal suffix written *-ing*, as in *working*. Note the following example:

Yesterday, I was walking down the street, tryin' to find the grocery store I had gone to the day before. Suddenly, I start seeing a whole bunch of grocery stores, and I'm goin' "Wait a minute. This isn't the street I was on before."

In this passage, two variants of the verbal suffix *-ing* (underlined) are used. All speakers of English do this. In more formal contexts, more *-ings* are used; more of the informal variant, *-in'*, are used in more informal, often friendly contexts. Moreover, the statistical rates of usage of one or the other variant differ along class, gender, social situation, and other lines, and the rates of use of the variants are predictable if one has sufficient social information on the speakers and the speech situation (for example, formal or informal).

Language contact is sometimes the driving force behind some of the variation used in styleshifting. But it is important to keep in mind that the speech of virtually all speakers of all languages shows this sort of highly patterned and systematic variation. It is called inherent variation because it is a basic component of all native speakers' usage. The chapters on vernacular dialects of English, Chicano English, and Dominican Spanish provide an opportunity to work through data sets illustrating inherent variation.

*Borrowing* is the term used for cases in which an item from one language,  $L_m$ , which provides the model for the item borrowed into a recipient language,  $L_r$ , is completely assimilated into  $L_r$  to the extent that native speakers of  $L_r$  usually do not know that the item is borrowed. Many English words have been borrowed, for example, from French: *perfume*, *déjà vu*, *avenue*, *pork*, *beef*, *détente*, and *laissez-faire*. Borrowing may result from direct contact, where speakers of the relevant languages share a community. Examples of this type are given in the chapters on Southwest Spanish, Navajo, Cajun French, and Chinese.

The term *interference* (the usual term in L2 research), or *language transfer* (the term used in historical linguistics), focuses on cases where aspects of the grammar of one's own native language are applied to items of the target language being learned. As an illustration, if a Spanish-English bilingual controls one language, say his L1, more than his other language, L2, then there may well be transfer into the L2 as the bilingual speaks it. Often transfer has to do with applying the phonology of an L1 to an item from an L2. For example, English (L2) *tennis* might be pronounced [tenis] by an L1 speaker of Spanish instead of [tɛnis], as it would

usually be pronounced in most native varieties of English. The pronunciation [tenis] reflects the application of Spanish phonology (which has /e/ and /i/ but lacks the phonemes /ɛ/ and /ɪ/) to an English word. (The Chicano English chapter provides problem sets containing more data of this type.)

In other cases, a bilingual might have English as her L1 (native language), but her English reflects the historical influence of Spanish. So, when she uses an English word that appears to have a Spanish pronunciation, it may simply be the way that she, and other members of her speech community, pronounces the English word in her ethnic dialect of English. (This is the case in numerous communities in which much of the population is descended from Spanish speakers.) While ethnic varieties are often disparaged by outsiders (but not linguists!), an ethnic variety of English in the U.S. often plays an important role in a speech community, including reflecting a positive in-group identity.

The process of L2 acquisition invariably involves not only transfer but also variation in learning, leading to the creation by the learner of a new mental grammar of the language. Thus, L2 acquisition by a whole community of speakers of a single L1 may lead to the creation of a new variety of the L2 influenced in part by the L1. For example, L1 Spanish speakers learning English as an L2 eventually led to the speech community's creation of Chicano English. AAE presents a more complex case: historically, Africans who arrived in the U.S. spoke an array of West African languages as well as creole languages of the Caribbean. Influences from both types of these ancestral languages can still be found in AAE today. While language learning under the influence of one or more than one L1 has been referred to as *imperfect* learning, an unfortunate word with negative connotations, the acquisition of an L1 or of an L2 is never perfect. Language acquisition is always a creative process and not merely a process that “copies and pastes” language from one individual or set of individuals into the learner's brain. (Jeff Pynes's insights [personal communication] were valuable in shaping our thoughts on L2 acquisition.)

### ***New Languages***

In this section, we turn our attention to new languages that may result from contact. Of these new languages, this book's chapters treat only creoles. Keep in mind that the term *creole*, in lower case, refers to a type of language. Languages are classified as creoles based mainly on sociohistorical criteria, but some types of grammatical features, illustrated in the Jamaican Creole, Haitian Creole, and Louisiana Creole chapters, are widespread in creole languages.

#### **SUPERSTRATE, LEXIFIER, AND SUBSTRATE LANGUAGES**

The **superstrate language** is that of the sociopolitically dominant group in the contact situation. It is typically the **lexifier language**, that providing most of the new language's vocabulary. Creole grammars take on grammatical

features (including vocabulary) from both the **substrate** (the language[s] of the subordinate groups) and the superstrate but may reflect innovations traceable to neither. Typically, especially in creoles in the Caribbean and West Africa, the superstrate provides most of the vocabulary, and the substrate provides the morphology, syntax, and semantics.

At this point, something should be said about two different types of situations in creole-speaking societies. We will use Caribbean countries as examples. In some countries, we find diglossia; in others, a creole continuum. As noted, diglossia refers to situations in which there is a prestige language variety (standard) used for “high” (H) functions (that is, in government, education, newspapers, etc.) and a nonprestige, low (L) language variety serving “low” functions (that is, talk among friends and family members and in other situations in which formality is not required). In Haiti, there is diglossia.

Jamaica offers an example of a **creole continuum**, a chain of minimally distinct speech varieties stretching from the acrolect (varieties closest to Standard Jamaican English), through the mesolect, to the most basilectal varieties (those furthest from the standard, showing the greatest continuity with their African roots). This is to say that with such continua, we do not find easily distinguishable speech varieties. Indeed, the acrolectal end of the continuum cannot always be easily distinguished from Standard Jamaican English itself. (See the chapter on Jamaican Creole in this book, which provides more details on what a creole continuum is like and the role of variation within it.)

An example of an **intermediate creole** is Bajan (also Barbadian Creole), the creole of Barbados. It is closer grammatically to its lexifier language, English, than the average creole, hence the use of this term to distinguish it from other creoles such as Jamaican, Haitian, and Papiamentu. Intermediate creoles are considered special cases of language shift to an L2, English in this case, in which L2 learning resulted in a language variety clearly different from most monolingual dialects of English. As such, the range of varieties spoken in a society such as Barbados will usually include **partially restructured languages** in terms of their grammatical distance from the lexifier. Thus, the basilectal range of intermediate creole varieties is further from the lexifier than the basilectal range of partially restructured languages such as AAE. This observation underlies the distinction between the two types, but it must be taken provisionally since in-depth studies of partially restructured languages as a group have only recently begun. Consequently, partially restructured languages are seen as cases of language shift (from indigenous and West African languages) to a European-language L2, resulting in a variety more similar to L1 varieties of the target European language than are found with intermediate creoles. No variety of partially restructured languages has enough creole-like grammatical features for linguists to want to classify it as a creole. So, while AAE (especially vernacular varieties) has some creole-like grammatical

features, they are not sufficient in number to warrant classifying any of its varieties as a creole, unlike the situation in Barbados.

In summary, all languages and their dialects have been affected by language contact. All too often language contact has led to the extinction or the near extinction of the subordinate language. But sometimes the outcome of language contact is the formation of a new variety, such as Jamaican Creole, or a new dialect of a language, such as Southwest Spanish.

There is increasing respect for languages of the types discussed in this chapter. For example, there are orthographies for many creole languages of the Americas and for many of the American Indian languages, and in some cases they have been officialized in education and/or government. This has happened in Haiti, for example, though there still remains a good deal of work to be done in implementing official policies, especially those calling for these languages' use in education.

Professional organizations such as the Linguistic Society of America and organizations such as UNESCO support as a fundamental right the use of one's own language variety throughout society. (See, for example, EMELD n.d.) Let us hope that more government institutions follow suit.

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