Contact Scenarios and Functional Transfer: The case of Spanish

Anna María Escobar (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)

Structural similarity between languages in contact is often cited in the literature as a facilitator of contact-induced phenomena (Thomason & Kaufman 1988:50; Thomason 2001:71), possibly leading to further structural congruence (cf. Matras 2007; Bowern 2013). These phenomena, apparently involving languages of similar typology (Matras 2009), seem to suggest that contact-induced phenomena are less common between non-related languages. These views seem to be at odds with observations from second-language acquisition, where typological differences between the two languages are regarded as fostering, rather than inhibiting, instances of first-language influence, while similarities (lexical cognates, for example) would facilitate acquisition (cf. Odlin 2007).

In an effort to better understand the complexities of language contact, researchers call attention to the need to incorporate more prominently in contact models the parameter of speaker interaction, since "any type of language change will begin at the level of the individual utterance in discourse." (Matras & Sakel 2007:848). Thomason and Kaufman’s assertion (1988:4) that "linguistic factors can be overridden by social factors pushing in the opposite direction." (cf. Thomason 2001:77) is supported when proposing social factors as particularly relevant in 'predicting' linguistic outcomes in language contact, such as, widespread bilingualism, the intensity of speaker contact (for example, through migration and increase of urbanization), and the presence of second-language speakers (cf. Kerswill & Williams 2005; Kerswill 2012; Mufwene 2001, 2008). In this presentation, we analyse contact phenomena from a contact scenario in which two non-related languages are in intense contact, and with widespread bilingualism. We argue that the contact scenario that they represent helps analyse contact-induced phenomena in contact between non-related languages under a different light.

The study of contact-induced phenomena between typologically different languages has focused primarily on borrowing of phonological material, through lexical and grammatical borrowing. Fewer studies have treated grammatical influence, also referred to as Functional Transfer, which has been explained as “less accessible to speaker
consciousness”, more “tightly integrated to the linguistic system”, and requiring the establishing of “equivalence relations” between the two languages (Mithun 2013:244-246). In this presentation, the grammatical influence of an Amerindian language (Quechua) into Spanish is presented to exemplify a case of functional transfer by analyzing time and possession in both languages, and by proposing the grammatical parallels that lead to the innovative constructions found in Andean Spanish (evidentiality and inanimate possession). The particular contact scenario of a Romance language, Spanish, with the most spoken Amerindian language in the Americas, Quechua, suggests a rich and diverse area of research for theorizing about linguistic influence in contact between typologically different languages, and about the Contact Scenario.