The role of transfer in language variation and change: Evidence from contact varieties of French

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In this Special Issue, the focus is on contact-induced language variation and change in situations of societal bilingualism that involve long-term contact between French and another language. As is well known, when two or more languages are spoken by groups of speakers in the same geographical area, over time, features from one language can be transferred to the other language, especially when the languages in question are unequal in terms of prestige, institutional support and demographic factors. The process that leads to the adoption of such features in the contact languages is generally known as INTERFERENCE or TRANSFER, and these terms are also used to describe the features in question (i.e. the end product of the process of transfer). In this issue we prefer to use the term TRANSFER over the use of the notion INTERFERENCE, as the former has fewer negative connotations than the latter.

While most researchers agree that transfer is possible in situations of societal bilingualism, there is much less agreement on the importance of transfer in comparison with internal factors in language change. In their summary of the discussion around the role of internal and external factors in language change, Farrar and Jones (2002, p. 4) point to the resistance against explanations based on external factors, which they call the "If-in-doubt-do-without" mentality:

Examining whether contact plays a role in change is therefore seen as a last resort, and "if in doubt" we should "do without" and simply not take this final step.

Thomason and Kaufman (1988, p. 14) are among the best known defenders of the role of transfer in language change and claim that "as far as the strictly linguistic possibilities go, any linguistic feature can be transferred from any language, to any other language". However, transfer remains very controversial in a wide range of subdisciplines of linguistics. As a matter of fact, using transfer as an explanatory tool has been suspect ever since the demise of contrastive analysis (Lado, 1957) which

sought to explain second language acquisition (SLA) almost entirely on the basis of transfer. As is well known, this turned out to be far too simplistic and basically untenable.

While many researchers in SLA recognise that transfer has its role to play in SLA (Kellerman and Sharwood Smith, 1986; White, 1991), Truscott and Sharwood Smith (2004, p. 14) express renewed doubts in their presentation of the Acquisition by Processing Theory (APT) and claim that "the appearance of L1 characteristics in L2 use, even when chronic and long-term, need not indicate transfer as it is normally understood". Thus, explaining features in learners' languages on the basis of transfer is still controversial, at least for some researchers.

In this issue we aim to show how the notion of transfer can be rehabilitated in research in language variation and change. Transfer is, however, not confined to the field of societal bilingualism: it also plays a central role in other fields, such as Second Language Acquisition, Bilingual First Language Acquisition (BFLA) and Creole Linguistics, to name just a few general areas. As we feel that it is important to situate the discussion in a wider perspective, we will briefly point to some important issues in the analysis of transfer in the fields mentioned above.

In the past and sometimes until fairly recently historical linguists, creole linguists, and specialists in BFLA were very sceptical of using transfer as an explanatory concept. Historical linguists generally used to focus on system-internal explanations and mechanisms rather than external explanations (see also Thomason and Kaufman, 1988, p. 59), because establishing a family-tree model becomes very difficult if transfer plays a major role in the historical development of a language. Recently, however, creole linguists have returned to substrate theories to explain the genesis of creole languages. According to Siegel (2000, p. 82) for example, it is becoming increasingly clear that substrate influence in a creole is the result of transfer of features in an earlier stage of development. Researchers such as Lefebvre (1998) even go as far as claiming that

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Haitian creole is a French relexification of languages of the Fongbe group, but scholars remain divided over the relative contribution of superstrate and substrate languages as well as the role of language universals in creole formation (Winford, 2003).

In BFLA, the dominant view is that bilingual children are able to separate their two languages from birth (Genesee, 1989; Meisel, 1989, 2001; De Houwer, 1995; van der Linden and Hulk, 1996, etc.). In this area of research there used to be strong resistance against the existence of interlingual influence in the early stages, in particular against more radical versions of this, as expressed in the idea of fusion (Volterra and Taeschner, 1978). Gawlitzek-Maiwald and Tracy (1996) were among the first to show that interlingual influence can play a crucial role in the acquisition of syntax: bilingual children may transfer a structure from their language A into their language B at a certain stage as a gap-filling strategy if they have not yet acquired the relevant structure in language B. However, they coined the term "bilingual bootstrapping" for this phenomenon, as the term transfer or interference has too many negative connotations whereas the term bilingual bootstrapping has positive connotations. The importance of cross-linguistic influence in syntax is now recognised by most researchers in BFLA (see for example Döpke, 2000; Müller and Hulk, 2001; Bernardini and Schlyter, 2004), not only at the level of syntax but also at other levels. Kehoe, Lleó and Rakow (2004), for example, in their analysis of the transfer of voicing features in bilingual children (as measured in voice onset time (VOT)), provide evidence for interlingual influence in phonetics.

Recent psycholinguistic research seems to support a renewed interest in transfer as an explanatory tool. According to Grosjean (2001), bilinguals never completely "switch off" or – in neural modeling terms – deactivate one of their two languages. When speaking to monolinguals of language A, the speaker is in a monolingual mode, i.e. speaks language A, and deactivates language B. According to Grosjean (2001, p. 7), "there is considerable evidence that bilinguals make dynamic interferences (ephemeral deviations due to the influence of the other deactivated language) even in the most monolingual of situations". Later these dynamic interferences may spread to other speakers of the same group or even to monolingual speakers, and become static interferences.

Partly in response to psycholinguistic evidence, Muysken (2000, p. 252) claims that the models of code-switching that rest on the idea of languages being either "on" or "off", such as the equivalence constraint proposed by Poplack (1980) and Myers-Scotton's (1993) model, are problematic because they cannot account for the co-occurrence of transfer and code-switching. Instead simultaneous access models are to be preferred. While Poplack and Meechan (1995, p. 200) define code-switching as

the juxtaposition of sentences of sentence fragments from two languages, each of which is internally consistent with the morphological and syntactic (and optionally, phonological) rules of its lexifier language,

in our view code-switching can but does not NECESSARILY involve a complete switch from one language to another. In many situations in which code-switching occurs, transfer is found too (though the opposite is not necessarily true).[1] As Clyne (1987) shows, code-switching may indeed be facilitated by convergence or overlapping between structures of two languages, and Boeschoten (1990) shows that in Turkish–Dutch code-switching Dutch grammar sometimes seems to be suspended: Dutch words are used in Turkish idiomatic constructions. "On-off" models of code-switching are also problematic, because they cannot account for the fact that bilinguals do not always use two different phonological systems when code-switching: it is well-known that words from language A that are inserted into language B need not be pronounced according to the phonetic/phonological rules of language A (Stenson, 1991): thus lexical items from language A are pronounced using the phonological system of language B. Muysken (2000) therefore proposes that – at least for two types of code-mixing (insertions and congruent lexicalisations) – the speaker probably has simultaneous access to components or modules of either language. Thus, although speakers can and sometimes do keep their languages separate, they do not always do so. The fact that speakers do not always keep their languages separate can perhaps be attributed to reasons of economy: if there is only one processing system, this may lead speakers to search for parallels between the languages.

One of the problems with using transfer as an explanatory tool is that predicting transfer is very difficult if not impossible. Some researchers therefore only accept transfer as an explanation if no system-internal explanations can be advanced (Martinet, 1955). Thomason and Kaufman (1988) and more recently Siegel (2000) have made proposals which can help identifying when an explanation based on transfer is appropriate. Thomason and Kaufman (1988, p. 60) states that "if a language has undergone structural interference in one subsystem, it will have undergone structural interference in other systems as well, from the same source". Though Thomason remains sceptical on whether or not it is possible to predict when transfer is likely to occur, Siegel proposes a number of constraints and principles which can help explain why some substrate features end up in creoles and others do not.

The current Special Issue is, to a certain extent, a sequel to Bullock and Toribio's (2004) Special Issue of *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, which focuses on convergence. The editors define convergence as

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[1] In a monolingual mode, speakers may be producing transfer, but they are unlikely to start code-switching.

the enhancement of inherent structural similarities found between two linguistic systems. In this way, convergence necessarily differs from transfer and interference, each of which imply the imposition of a structural property from a foreign source. (Bullock and Toribio, 2004, p. 91)

The authors also posit that convergence is "not necessarily externally induced" (p. 91).

While Bullock and Toribio stress the differences between convergence and transfer, we are inclined to see more similarities than differences between both processes. Bullock and Toribio show that convergence need not involve external influence, but there are many cases – also among those discussed in the Special Issue – where convergence DOES involve the transfer of a feature from one language to the other: the transfer of an American English rhoticized schwa into Frenchville French (Bullock and Gerfen, 2004) is a case in point. In our understanding of the concepts, convergence differs from transfer in that convergence often entails the reduction or elimination of marked structures in either language or it can lead to a situation in which both languages adopt a compromise between their conflicting structures (Winford, 2003, p. 63). In those cases, no features are being exchanged between the two languages, but somehow a levelling of differences takes place, as has been described for English dialects for example (Kerswill, 2002). As Thomason and Kaufman (1988, p. 90) and Chaudenson, Mougeon and Beniak (1993, p. 67) show, transfer can produce the exact opposite effect: the adoption of features from an external source may sometimes lead to COMPLEXIFICATION (i.e. an unmarked feature is replaced by a marked feature) and in these cases an internal development is rather unlikely. In this issue, Mougeon, Nadasdi and Rehner discuss, for example, the case of a change where a more specific preposition takes the place of a more general preposition: the replacement of Standard French (SF) *à* with *sur* in Ontarian French (OF), as in (1) and (2), respectively.

(1) C'est toute de la musique à la radio. (SF)
(2) C'est toute de la musique sur la radio. (OF)
   "It's nothing but music on the radio."

As in many other fields, the fact that researchers use different definitions of basic concepts or create new terminology can make it difficult to compare research results. The area of language contact is unfortunately no exception. Researchers use very different definitions of TRANSFER, INTERFERENCE and CONVERGENCE. Weinreich (1963, p. 1), for example, defines interference as "those instances of deviation from the norms of either language which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language, i.e. as a result of language contact". This wide definition of interference is reflected in Clyne's (2003)

notion TRANSFERENCE, which covers lexical, semantic, phonetic/phonological, prosodic, tonemic, graphemic, morphological and syntactic phenomena. For Clyne, transference is the process of transferring forms, features or constructions from one language to another, whereas transfer is the product, i.e. the end result of the process of transference.

In this Special Issue we adopt a less broad definition of transfer, as we consider the occurrence of (free or bound) morphemes from language A in stretches of speech of language B to be instances of borrowing or code-switching. Critically, in our understanding of transfer, NO LEXICAL MATERIAL is being transferred: instead sounds (phonemes or phones), syntactic structures, aspects of the meaning of certain words, pragmatic rules or conventions may be transferred from language A to language B without any accompanying transfer of lexical items. Thus, for example, *une fois* (lit. "once") is used in slightly different ways in Brussels French and in Standard French (Treffers-Daller, this issue) and some of these uses can be shown to be examples of pragmatic transfer from Brussels Dutch, but the Dutch lexical items that are the likely source of this usage in Brussels French are not being transferred.

Transfer is much less visible than code-switching or borrowing, and this may be one of the reasons why transfer has received much less attention than code-switching or borrowing in recent years. Transfer presents itself in subtle quantitative or qualitative differences in the way in which monolinguals and bilinguals use certain sounds, words, phrases, etc. Our definition of transfer is thus very close to what Thomason and Kaufman (1988, p. 115) call INTERFERENCE. According to these authors "morphosyntactic interference through shift more often makes use of reinterpreted and/or restructured TL [target language] morphemes".[2] Following Mougeon and Beniak (1991) we distinguish between OVERT TRANSFER and COVERT TRANSFER. The former is used to refer to situations where the features found in a contact situation constitute a qualitative departure from monolingual norms, whereas the latter refers to situations where there are only quantitative differences between the use of certain constructions or sounds by monolinguals and bilinguals. Two examples from Jersey Norman French (Jèrriais), as presented in Jones (this issue), may clarify the distinction. In modern Jèrriais, the use of the auxiliary *être* "to be" in age constructions, where French uses the form *avoir* (*J'ai dix ans*) and English uses *to be* (*I am ten years old*), forms a qualitative departure from monolingual French norms, as this construction is not found in other varieties of French that have not undergone influence from English. On the other hand, if there are two competing forms in language A, one of which has a parallel form in the contact language B, the form which corresponds to the

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2 In their definition of interference, however, the direction of influence is from L1 to L2, whereas any influence (whether lexical or structural) from L2 to L1 is seen as borrowing.

one in language B may gain territory at the expense of the other. Thus, Jones (this issue) shows that there is a tendency in modern Jèrriais for *acouo* (Standard French *encore* "again") to encroach on the ground of *re-*, and this may be due to covert transfer from English. In this case, there is only a quantitative departure from other varieties of French, as *encore* is attested in Standard French, but used differently in this variety.

One central point stressed in several studies in this Special Issue is that in order to 'rehabilitate' the investigation of the role of transfer in language change, arguments for and against transfer need to be carefully considered, and based on data gathered via a proper methodology (see, for instance, in relation to French, Mougeon and Beniak, 1991 and Treffers-Daller, 1999). In so doing, these studies have shown that the role of interference in linguistic change cannot be conceived in absolute terms. Contact varieties of French, or French interlanguage, include a range of phenomena where, at one end interference is the only plausible source and at the other end it can merely looked upon as having 'catalysed' or reinforced the rise of an intrasytemically-motivated phenomenon. These studies have also shown that the extent to which transfer-induced innovations will or will not emerge in contact varieties of French depends crucially on the level of contact experienced by the speakers of such varieties.

This Special Issue examines the role of transfer in linguistic variation and change in varieties of French in two different sociolinguistic situations: i) language maintenance and ii) language shift. In the first situation, French is typically dominated by a superstrate language, Francophones are bilingual but French is maintained, to a varying extent, in the primary domains of language reproduction (i.e. home, neighbourhood and/or school). Conversely, in the second setting, French is a superstrate language, Francophones are also bilingual but, to a varying extent, they use French rather than the substrate language(s) in the primary domains of language reproduction.

In many cases internal and external factors co-operate in the emergence of innovations in situations of language contact. Wherever such innovations can be shown to result in SIMPLIFICATION of structures or patterns in the contact languages, this is likely to be a case of multiple causation (Thomason, 1988), i.e. both internal developments and extra-systemic developments lead to the same result: simplification of existing structures in that, for example, a more marked variant is dropped to the advantage of a less marked form. In situations such as these, it can be extremely difficult to disentangle the relative contribution of transfer on the one hand and, on the other hand, internal simplificatory tendencies in producing the innovation.

The main aim of the issue is to show that it is possible, in the cases discussed here, to determine the likelihood that innovations observed in a minority language are, indeed, the result of language contact and to show that such determination is dependant on the use of a principled methodology.

In the first paper of this issue, Mougeon, Nadasdi and Rehner present the methodological approach that can help distinguish contact-induced change from internal developments. Crucially, this involves a comparison of different corpora of French. The corpora studied by Mougeon et al. include a corpus of Ontarian French that is heavily influenced by English (though to varying degrees, depending on the locality of Ontario where the speakers live), whereas in others (i.e. a corpus from Quebec City) it is not. A third corpus of learners of French as a second language (French-immersion Anglophone students) is used to provide additional evidence for the demonstration that the innovations are due to transfer from English, as these speakers have less contact with everyday French than the most restricted speakers in the Ontario corpus. Mougeon et al. subsequently describe the four-step methodology that can be used to establish the origin of particular innovations in Ontarian French. These steps are the following:

- Step One: Is there an equivalent feature in language B?
- Step Two: Can the innovation be looked upon as the outcome of a process of regularisation?
- Step Three: Is there evidence in genetically-related varieties of language A militating for or against contact-based explanations?
- Step Four: Is the distribution of the innovation linearly correlated with level of contact with language B?

Mougeon et al. conclude that the eight innovations under study can be shown to be due to contact with English, and that the emergence and diffusion of such innovations are conditioned by two key related factors: i) the intensity of contact at the speaker and community level, and ii) the extent to which a given innovation departs from the rules of the traditional norm (i.e. the variety of the minority language spoken by individuals who experience moderate or minimal levels of contact with the majority language).

The second and the third paper focus on other varieties of Northern American French, i.e. a variety spoken in Frenchville (Pennsylvania) and Cajun French from different localities in Louisiana. Bullock and Gerfen's contribution is a sequel to their paper in the Special Issue of *BLC* on convergence, in which they focused on the transfer of a Northern American rhoticized vowel into the speech of two elderly speakers of Frenchville French. Their current paper shows that the French mid round vowels, [œ] and [ø], have often been replaced by the English rhoticized schwa as found in the word *sir*. However, French schwa, which is arguably phonetically

non-distinct from the mid front round vowels, does not participate fully in this merger. In many instances, lexical schwa is preserved and is non-rhotic in many cases. Thus, the authors argue that transfer between two sound systems should not be seen as a simple case of phonetic replacement. The paper raises interesting theoretical questions for the way phonological and phonetic levels interact. Importantly, for our Special Issue, the authors conclude that the transferred properties that French receives from English as a result of contact do not translate in any direct way to loss or simplification. Thus, a complex pattern of transfer versus maintenance emerges that does not fit easily within existing theories of transfer or convergence.

Dubois and Noetzl make a detailed analysis of three different categories of locative prepositions in Cajun French (Louisiana), following the approach developed by Mougeon and Beniak (1991) and elaborated on in this issue. They demonstrate that the usage of *au* and *en* before buildings as in *au école* 'to or at school' is probably due to transfer, whereas other uses of the prepositions are the result of a process of regularisation. They also show that restricted speakers of the older generations are the true innovators, and that subsequent generations of fluent and restricted speakers adopt all innovations previous generations have introduced.

In the last two papers, the focus shifts from the North-American continent to Europe. The paper on Brussels French by Treffers-Daller is different from the others in that French is the dominant language of the speech community in Brussels, whereas in all other situations described in the Special Issue, English is dominant and French is being maintained to different degrees, depending on a range of factors. Treffers-Daller follows Mougeon's methodology and compares corpora of different varieties of French in order to establish whether the use of *une fois* 'lit. once' is to be attributed to inter-systemic factors (i.e. contact with the local variety of Dutch) or an internal development. As it turns out, some uses of *une fois* can be traced back to sixteenth-century French, but there is one usage that cannot be found anywhere except in varieties of French that have undergone influence from Germanic substrates or adstrates: whenever *une fois* is used to mitigate imperatives, this usage is probably an example of overt transfer. Other uses are better analysed as examples of covert transfer, because they only represent a quantitative departure from monolingual norms.

In the final paper, Jones presents an in-depth analysis of Jersey Norman French (Jèrriais), comparing the occurrence of features that could potentially originate in transfer with the occurrence of these features in a wide range of other sources, such as modern Norman French, the French dialects spoken on other Channel Islands and a variety of historical written sources. Investigating overt and covert transfer in Jèrriais presents a particular challenge, because establishing what monolingual norms are is difficult when all current speakers are bilingual. A very careful comparison of a variety of sources as carried out in this case is therefore required. Jones concludes that covert transfer is generally more widespread in this variety than its overt counterpart, possibly because native speakers might be less conscious of transfer forms which do not involve a qualitative departure from traditional linguistic norms.

The five papers in this Special Issue demonstrate in a variety of ways that overt and covert transfer are important factors in language change. It is also possible, in most cases, to identify the sources of the innovations and to establish beyond doubt what the contribution of intra-systemic and inter-systemic factors is in the emergence of these innovations. As four of the five papers focus on the influence of English on French, a comparison of the outcome of language contact in these situations shows that transfer leads to similar phenomena in a number of cases. Overt and covert transfer seem to be relatively common in the choice of prepositions in Toronto French, Cajun French and in Jèrriais, for example, and similar phenomena have been reported for Brussels French (Baetens Beardsmore, 1971), but these have not been investigated in the current contribution. It is clear that more comparative work which focuses on interaction between French and other languages is needed to establish what components of French grammar are likely to be affected by transfer in situations of language contact and whether these components are equally vulnerable in BFLA or SLA. We do not think that syntax proper is immune to convergence (or transfer), as Bullock and Toribio (2004, p. 92) claim. If this were the case, it would be difficult to account for the Asia Minor Greek data presented in Dawkins (1916) (see also Backus (2004), who makes a similar point). While the transfer phenomena we discuss in this issue do not go as far as those discussed by Dawkins, French-based creoles would probably offer more dramatic transfer-induced change in phonology and/or syntax (see Lefebvre, 1998). Further research into the role of transfer across different subdisciplines in linguistics can no doubt shed more light on this issue.

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