Typologising contact-induced changes in grammatical constructions

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There is now an extensive literature on contact-induced change in grammatical (i.e. morphosyntactic) constructions. Since Harris & Campbell’s (1995) and Prince’s (1998) seminal work on the topic, a number of attempts have been made to typologise contact-induced morphosyntactic changes (Johanson 2002, Aikhenvald 2003, Sakel & Matras 2008). All of these are useful in different ways. This talk proposes yet another typology, based on the degree to which and manner in which a construction is altered as a result of contact.

Contact-induced changes are often classified according to whether they are a result of bilingual copying or as a result of rapid language shift entailing incomplete second-language learning. Although the two categories of contact can often be distinguished on the basis of their linguistic outcomes, I suggest that their morphosyntactic outcomes are generally indistinguishable and offer a reason for this. In the belief that progress in contact linguistics can only be made by examining cases where we have a good understanding of (i) the changes that have occurred, (ii) the sociolinguistic circumstances of contact, and (iii) the language from which a construction has been ‘copied’, illustrations of contact-induced morphosyntactic change will be offered from Colloquial Upper Sorbian (Scholze 2008) and Irish English (Harris 1991, Hickey 2010).

References


