

METATYPIC EFFECTS IN LANGUAGE GENESIS

Umberto Ansaldo

The University of Hong Kong

This paper applies the notion of metatypy to the genesis of contact languages based on a number of Asian case studies, in particular in Sri Lanka Malay, Baba Malay and Cocos Malay. Metatypy is a process of typological congruence known to occur in prolonged and intense situations of contact due to wide-spread multilingualism. In this process, contact-induced language transfer leads to the evolution of grammatical patterns that emerge as syntactic compromises between the actual grammars in contact (Ross 1996, 2006). In this paper I show that metatypy efficiently explains the evolution of a new language – Sri Lanka Malay – as the outcome of the contact between Sinhala, Lankan Tamil and Trade Malay. The grammar of Sri Lanka Malay shows an extremely high degree of syntactic compromise, due to a language shift caused by contact-induced transfer of Sinhala and Lankan Tamil in the everyday usage of Trade Malay. This is first and foremost illustrated for the nominal domain, where Sri Lanka Malay exhibits a typical Lankan case system, though the verbal domain is also touched upon to highlight metatypic effects. In addition, metatypic effects can account for what is retained and what is lost in the recombination of features that typically occurs in contact language formation. This is shown through examples from Baba Malay and Cocos Malay grammars. In accounting for a majority of the features of Sri Lanka Malay grammar, as well as making sense of strong of congruence patterns in other contact environments, metatypy emerges as a powerful framework among accounts of language genesis (Ansaldo 2009). Metatypy also sheds light on the reasons for the evolution of a new language, relying on the principles of second/third language transfer and contact-induced cognitive compromise known to occur in metatypic ecologies.

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