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**Book review of: Language Contact by Yaron Matras,
2009, Cambridge University Press, 366 p. ISBN:
978-0-521-53221-1**

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► **To cite this version:**

Evangelia Adamou. Book review of: Language Contact by Yaron Matras, 2009, Cambridge University Press, 366 p. ISBN: 978-0-521-53221-1. *Lingua*, 2010, 120 (7), pp.1850-1852. 10.1016/j.lingua.2010.03.003 . halshs-00470364

HAL Id: halshs-00470364

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00470364>

Submitted on 6 Apr 2010

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Book review

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Book title: Language Contact
Book author/ editor(s): Yaron Matras
Publisher: Cambridge University Press
Year of publication: 2009
Number of pages: 366
ISBN: 978-0-521-53221-1

Yaron Matras has authored some of the most innovative research on language contact published over the last several years, through either individual or collective works (Matras & Bakker eds. 2003, Matras & Sakel eds. 2007). His research is carried out within the functional framework, in continuation of the pioneer works by Weinreich (1953), Haugen (1953), Labov (1972) and Grosjean (1982), among others. This textbook comes as a useful, complete presentation of Matras's theoretical advances on language contact. It also serves as an updated introduction to the highly dynamic domain that is contact linguistics, albeit always filtered through the author's theoretical point of view. Covering most aspects of language contact, from bilingual child acquisition to typology, this textbook is an excellent overview of the field for undergraduate or graduate students. Matras is keen neither on definitions nor on systematic tracking of terminology, which may at time make the reading difficult for undergraduates, who will need active back-up from their professors. Still, the author offers a comprehensive look at language contact, in a pleasant academic style. Numerous examples from a variety of languages illustrate the relevant phenomena and theoretical view-points, the majority being first-hand data from the author's languages of specialty, e.g. Romani, but also some every day, casual examples that most bilingual speakers will be able to identify with easily. The book is organized into 10 chapters with a clear thematic organization and many cross-references throughout the different chapters. It includes a bibliography as well as language, subject and authors indices (pp. 323-366).

Matras's approach to language contact is founded on the postmodern understanding of language as a continuum of uses rather than as a system. Based on the observation that 'language contact' as such does not exist, Matras re-centers contact induced change in speech production: i.e. both in language processing and communication goals. In this approach, the multilingual speaker is the locus of repertoires: entire repertoires or specific parts of them are associated with particular social activities and are regulated by the prescriptive attitudes of the speech community. Although the author does not use the term, it would seem that his aim is to propose a universal model for language contact change, almost -though not entirely- independent of specific social circumstances. Contrary to previous approaches to language contact, such as the most often cited Thomason & Kaufman (1988), for Matras, social and sociolinguistic aspects are relevant yet secondary; they simply interfere at a secondary level, to 'license' language change. This theoretical hierarchy is nevertheless reconsidered in several cases, most importantly "contact languages", for which the author admits that sociolinguistic factors are central to understanding the linguistic phenomena.

Throughout the book language contact is observed operating at different levels: starting with child multilingualism, partaking in some cases in a broader, social multilingualism that either blocks or allows the -unavoidable- language contact effects to settle and ultimately lead to language change. According to the author two main mechanisms are at play at all levels: the first mechanism concerns discourse operators, which are the linguistic forms most easily transmitted from one language repertoire to another. The second mechanism concerns linguistic structures that show a constant tendency towards parallelism via their functional similarities.

Ch. 2, "An emerging multilingual repertoire", illustrates bilingual child acquisition. Based on a case study of a trilingual child, the author demonstrates that the child fails to select the appropriate language repertoire particularly where discourse operators are concerned. According to the author, this "fusion" of the repertoires is more likely to happen when a change in the pragmatic setting is in a transitional phase and the speaker is still under the influence of the most recent "pragmatically dominant language". Separation of the various language repertoires also proves to be hard to achieve when linguistic "organization patterns" are involved. Although this is a well-known

phenomenon in contact linguistics, Matras usefully delimits it: linguistic structures are replicated from one language to another mainly through a “pivot-matching” process. A shared construction function in the two repertoires serves as the pivot for the multilingual child to match a non-shared function. This sort of production comes up against either adult or community acceptance or refusal, determining its chances of being reproduced in later discourse.

Ch. 3 continues on “societal multilingualism” and deals with the process of distinguishing between the linguistic repertoires as the child is integrated into a structured monolingual or multilingual community. The multilingual child learns to select the appropriate language repertoire based on the addressee’s competence and expectations, the interaction settings and contexts, the topics of conversation, and the norms that apply to language selection. Matras stresses how in multilingual societies language repartition is generally determined by communication domains. The “dominant” language is the one that fits the most communication settings, usually those belonging to the public domain, as well as power related domains such as institutions. On the other hand, “non-dominant” languages, because of their use in a limited number of interactions and often by multilingual speakers, tend to be more affected by language contact and range among the most endangered languages.

Ch. 4 offers an overview of the existing literature on second-language acquisition. Evidence from studies on language processing is cited to support Matras’s view of multilingualism as a sum of pragmatically dependant repertoires. Following Green (1998), Matras argues that for a multilingual speaker all repertoires are activated, although evidence exists in the literature for both non-selective and selective processing. Matras favors the “all languages on” analysis based on the numerous speech-errors encountered in the repertoire selection even among the most skilled multilingual speakers and despite them being contrary to their local communicative goals. Such “dysfunctions” in repertoire selection frequently intervene during complex communicational tasks and within “semi-lexical and gesture-like” communicative routines, favoring the intrusion of the latest pragmatically dominant language (though not necessarily the speaker’s dominant or first language).

Ch. 5 broaches codeswitching and borrowing as a continuum of uses available in the multilingual repertoires (as does Myers-Scotton 1993). Nevertheless, the attempt to offer a comprehensive set of parameters in order to distinguish between codeswitching and borrowing is most welcome: i.e. the degree of bilingualism (monolingual vs. bilingual), the degree of composition (utterance vs. single lexeme) and of functionality of the items (stylistic vs. default use), the unique character of the referent (lexical vs. para-lexical), its operability (core vocabulary vs. grammatical operations), the regularity (single vs. regular occurrence) and the structural integration (non-integrated vs. integrated). Repertoire mixing is more or less intense and frequent, depending on the communicative contexts. As has been shown for selection errors, repertoires are more vulnerable at the level of “utterance modifiers” (a broad category including e.g. conjunctions, tags, fillers, interjections, focus particles). Language change is observed when the use of certain items from one repertoire is extended to all contexts.

This brings the reader to Chapters 6-9, which present contact induced change in detail, or, in the author’s own words, the cases of the permanent use of linguistic “matter” (sound-shapes of words and morphs) and “constructions” in the inventory of a language. Pursuing personal and collective research, in Ch. 6 Matras focuses on the “borrowability hierarchy”, i.e. he attempts to classify word classes, categories and types of morphemes depending on their likelihood of being borrowed cross-linguistically. This hierarchy was elaborated through two samples, created within two international projects hosted by Manchester University: a significant Romani sample (Elšik & Matras 2006) - offering the possibility of observing contact between various languages of the same group with a variety of languages, mainly Indo-European - and a diversified cross-linguistic sample of 27 languages (Matras & Sakel eds. 2007). Both studies show that nouns are the items most frequently borrowed, followed by verbs, discourse markers, adjectives, interjections, adverbs, various particles, numerals, pronouns, derivational affixes and last, inflectional affixes. The items in question are highly heterogeneous from a structural point of view: one finds semantic, syntactic, morphological and phonological features. This is a conscious choice however, coherent with the general framework, which favors semantic-pragmatic criteria over all others, and relates them to mental processing. From this perspective, the author isolates various criteria undergoing this hierarchy, such as the

“utilitarian” motivation, the need to reduce the processing load, the speaker’s weak or strong control.

In Chapters 7 and 8, “matter” or “form” borrowings are examined in detail, namely lexical borrowing (Ch. 7) as well as grammatical and phonological borrowing (Ch. 8). It is noted that the ‘proximity’, ‘familiarity’, and ‘frequency’ principles discourage lexical borrowing. Then follows an overview of the loanword and loan verb integration strategies. While loanwords are generally integrated in the recipient language’s noun inflection paradigm, noun inflection is rarely borrowed from one language into another (with the remarkable exception of Romani and, more importantly, mixed languages). Loan verbs on the other hand show a variety of integration strategies, as suggested recently by Wichmann & Wohlgemuth (2007). On this subject, Matras insists on their continuum aspect: light verbs, indirect insertion, direct insertion and paradigm transfer. Romani once again provides original materials to illustrate the borrowing of entire verb inflection paradigms along with the loan verbs (i.e. in the Balkans and Russia). When trying to explain the reasons for this, the author points to the full acceptance of bilingualism as an aspect of group identity.

Ch. 8 begins with discourse markers and connectors which are to be found among the highest levels of the borrowability hierarchy. Matras traces this phenomenon back to the repertoire selection mechanism which fails to control such “gesture-like” items. Greetings are also addressed in this chapter as discourse-level borrowings, even though, as the author recognizes, in many cases they also signal identity. Many categories are examined in detail such as phasal adverbs (‘already’, ‘still’), focus particles, indefinites, etc. The resulting idea is that some items are more likely to be borrowed either because they are more adapted to a particular social activity, or because they occur in intense communicative negotiation and thus block the speaker’s repertoire selection mechanism. This is the first step, located at the bilingual speaker’s level and that of interaction, the next step being generalization within the linguistic community and then on to full-status borrowing.

Phonological convergence is examined in relation to the bilingualism intensity: the less intense the bilingualism, the more the phonological systems will remain distinct and the more intense the bilingualism, the more the two systems will overlap. Matras also points

out that in the borrowability hierarchy, prosody is the most prone to contact (since it is the least prone to conveying meaning -a rather blurry explanation since the author includes tones in this category), followed by stress.

In Ch. 9, various types of pattern replication are presented based on recent rich literature: lexical semantics, clause combining and phrase level patterns (word order, adpositions), morphology and morphological paradigms (TMA, alignment, case, etc.). Unlike matter replication, no pattern convergence hierarchies are proposed because of their ‘versatile’ character. The author argues that explicative factors for pattern convergence are to be found in discourse strategies and language attitudes rather than in the communities’ sociolinguistic profiles. Next to the well-known grammaticalization process in pattern replication, Matras rightfully draws attention to the creative, abrupt processes induced by pivot-matching. This chapter also addresses the most famous expression of “pattern” convergence: “linguistic areas”. Next to the classic references on the topic the reader will find here a very interesting discussion on recent debates relative to methodological issues and the various linguistic-area candidates.

Last, Ch. 10 covers one of the most fascinating aspects of language contact: the sudden creation of new “contact languages”. In past decades tremendous progress has been made on the comprehension of languages such as pidgins, creoles and so-called mixed languages. What they all point to is the use of general language contact strategies, but used massively, and in a creative way that only takes place in specific sociolinguistic settings.

To conclude with the question the author himself asks in the introductory chapter: “is this yet another textbook on language contact?” Comparing *Language contact* with previous successful textbooks it is clear that the book is relevant in today’s literature. It is inspired and sums up the advances in the various domains of contact linguistics: sociolinguistics and pragmatics (with the notion of repertoires and a focus on the individual and the society), diachronic, typological and descriptive linguistics (for language change), as well as neurolinguistics and psycholinguistics.

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