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Review of Convergence and Divergence in Language Contact Situations

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Braunmüller, Kurt & Juliane House, eds. 2009. *Convergence and Divergence in Language Contact Situations*. (= *Hamburg Studies on Multilingualism*, 8.) Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

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This volume is based on the contributions to a symposium on language contact held at the Hamburg Research Center on Multilingualism in October 2007. It consists of an introduction and nine articles divided into three thematic sections.

The brief introduction by Kurt Braunmüller and Juliane House provides a historical overview of the field of language contact, from the debates on contact-induced language change in nineteenth-century historical linguistics to a variety of issues discussed at the beginning of this century. The introduction concludes with a brief outline of each article.

Part I “Challenges to Accepted Views of Convergence and Divergence in Language Contact Situations” opens with Georg Bossong’s “Divergence, Convergence, Contact: Challenges for the Genealogical Classification of Languages”. The article reexamines the central premise of the comparative method – the family tree model of language descent – and argues that a more accurate picture of linguistic evolution can be obtained only when convergence phenomena are given equal weight with those describing divergence. The article argues that by favoring divergence over convergence, the family tree model provides a skewed view of language history and classification. After discussing cases which suggest the autonomy of the lexical and grammatical components of language and hence present challenges to the singular descent paradigm represented by the family tree model (creoles, mixed languages, culturally relexified languages such as Persian and Japanese, and structurally converged languages such as Korean/Japanese and Quechua/Aymara), the author outlines his own divergence-convergence model of linguistic evolution. The model abstracts away from views favoring language-internal evolutionary explanations and replaces the dichotomy between inheritance and borrowing with the notion of contact, which is meant to cover both vertical and horizontal channels of transmission of linguistic traits. Although it remains to be seen whether a classification that does not distinguish between inheritance and borrowing may prove useful, this article may stimulate further research with interesting applications in creole and other language contact studies.

Östen Dahl’s article, “Increases in Complexity as a Result of Language Contact” discusses cases of increases in “system complexity” in languages which come into sustained, intergenerational contact. The author argues that increases in language complexity, defined as one needing a longer description, result from competition between the ways in which the languages in contact accomplish a given function, usually the result of one grammar incorporating an additional form or structure from the other, resulting in a choice where there was none prior to contact. The competing constructions either receive complementary functional load, or are combined in one paradigm, the former case often resulting in new distinctions the receiving language lacked prior to contact. These developments are usually strongest at the geographical point of convergence (the “buffer zone”), lessening steadily with distance from that point. Since contact is usually thought to result in simplification, not complexification, this article adds an important dimension to the discussion, polishing the opposite side of the contact-

induced change can be demonstrated that where sustained, intergenerational and generalized contact is involved, loss in system complexity is not to be expected. The cases considered all come from languages of Northern Europe; however, it is reasonable to expect that where pairs of languages elsewhere in the world are as closely related and in the same type and length of contact, similar results are likely to follow.

In Kurt Braunmüller's contribution "Converging Genetically Related Languages: *Endstation* Code Mixing?" the theme of genetically closely related grammars in contact is carried on through a close look at the simultaneous use by bilingual speakers of closely related tongues in bilingual communities, and dealing with some of the same languages covered by Dahl: Danish, Norwegian, Faroese and German. The areas and language pairs considered are: The Faroe Islands (Faroese and Danish), Norway (Norwegian and Danish) and the area of northern Germany closest to the Danish border (German and Danish). Braunmüller argues that in bringing their combined linguistic resources to bear in speaking, bilinguals evolve new linguistic and sociolinguistic norms, ultimately creating new local varieties. The model advanced is represented as a four-step process. It begins with lexical borrowings (Step 1), whose gradual increase in frequency redefines the usage norms with respect to monolingual outside users of both codes (Step 2). Step 3 in the code-mixing hierarchy involves incorporation of L1 morphosyntax (e.g., inflectional endings) into the language variety of bilingual users. In Step 4, generalized code-mixing becomes the norm, at least so far as the local bilingual community is concerned. This situation is described as one in which people may know that the grammar of one or both languages differs somewhat from the target variety but speakers do not care "because they always know what the speaker intended to say". By establishing a framework within which to explain several divergent-looking phenomena, the article provides an interesting contribution to our understanding of the consequences of bilingualism in closely related languages while also articulating the step-by-step process by which a whole new language variety can come into being in areas of sustained contact by closely related languages.

Part II "Convergence and Divergence in Different Varieties in Oral and Written Discourse" opens with Steffen Höder's "Converging Languages, Diverging Varieties: Innovative Relativisation Patterns in Old Swedish". This paper examines *Ausbau*-induced typological changes in the relativization patterns of Old Swedish under the influence of Latin, leading to a typological split between the spoken and written varieties of the language – ones resulting in a grapholect of Swedish sharply divergent from other varieties of Swedish, and more like Latin in character. Thoughtfully argued and thoroughly documented, this article is among the best contributions to the volume.

In "Converging Verbal Phrases in Related Languages: A Case Study from Faro-Danish and Danish-German Language Contact Situations", Karoline H. Köhl and Hjalmar P. Petersen examine verb phrases in extended elicited discourse in L2 Danish on the Faroe Islands and in northern Germany. By closely examining the bilingual verb phrases, the authors conclude that in many cases these exhibit properties of the speaker's L1 grafted subconsciously onto utterances in the speakers' non-dominant languages, resulting in a change of meaning actually conveyed from that originally intended. Contrary to earlier proposals, the authors find that both the morphological realization patterns and predicate-argument structure of bilingual verb phrases are susceptible to inter-linguistic transfer. The paper concludes with the proposal that the language

contributing the predicate-argument structure should be considered the bilingual's dominant language.

“Convergence and Divergence of Communicative Norms through Language Contact in Translation” by Viktor Becher, Juliane House and Svenja Kranich builds on earlier work by House on covert translation, whereby the translator adapts the source-language text to target language textual norms. After noting that German and English texts vary along dimensions of directness/indirectness and content orientation/addressee orientation, the article asks whether when translators render English scientific texts into German, they always apply the desired German “cultural filter,” or are instead adapting their German translations – and thus the German language treatment of popular science in general – to English textual norms. The article looks at the way modal expressions in English originals are translated into German as well as the extent to which English concessive uses of *but* are or are not translated into their German equivalents, *aber* and/or *doch*. Both variables are assumed to be indicative of the differences in the respective textual norms, one that allows a greater level of author/reader interactivity (English) and one that is tilted toward a more definitive, content-oriented reading (German). Searching for these indicators during two four-year periods (1978-1982 and 1999-2002) in both a set of translations and in German and British general corpora, the authors find that when translators perceive a high degree of “functional equivalence” between English and German they are likely to produce German renditions which conform more closely to English norms. Hence, where English uses *but*, German has *aber* and *doch*, which are shown to be on the upswing in the context of German popular science texts, both translated from the English and non-translated German originals. The absence of convergence in the case of modal verbs is explained through profound differences in the way epistemic modality is handled in English and German.

Robert E. Vann's article “On the Importance of Spontaneous Speech Innovations in Language Contact Situations” proposes to reinterpret work done over the past half century on language contact in the light of its potential to shed light on the linguistic, sociolinguistic and ethnographic dimensions of innovative linguistic uses by bilinguals. Drawing on a variety of published sources, the paper documents several kinds of changes from a range of contact situations involving Spanish in areas as diverse as Barcelona, Paraguay and Southern California. The article ends with a plea to create completely free, open corpora of digital recordings of spoken Spanish in order to try to locate innovations as they happen on the ground.

Part III “Phonological Processes of Variation and Change in Bilingual Individuals” opens with “Gradient Merging of Vowels in Barcelona Catalan under the Influence of Spanish” by Susana Cortés, Conxita Lleó and Ariadna Benet. The article reports on the results of two related experiments investigating the hypothesis that under the pervasive influence of Spanish among their peers and at school, the Catalan of bilingual young children in Barcelona is merging phonologically with Spanish, the dominant language of two thirds of the population. The particular focus of the study is the Catalan vocalic system, with its / ϵ /, / ω / and unstressed schwa, which are not shared with Spanish. Data from a total of sixty participants in three Barcelona districts are examined, first impressionistically, then acoustically, and it is found that while the Catalan of adults in all three regions remains stable, the vocalic system of the Catalan-speaking children of

the Nou Barris area (the most Spanish-dominant of the three districts examined) is compressing toward convergence with that of Spanish.

The closing article of the volume is “Comparing the Representation of Iambs by Monolingual German, Monolingual Spanish and Bilingual German-Spanish Children” by Javier Arias and Conxita Lleó. The article asks how the acquisition of words with iambic stress might differ in German and in Spanish, given that while both languages are mostly based on trochees, Spanish has more iambs than German. Situating their work in the context of the work of Hayes and others in this area, Arias and Lleó wonder if the emergence of proper stress placement and noticeably iambic production will show interaction effects among bilingual German-Spanish children. The researchers recorded two children with each type of language competency status (monolingual German-speaking, monolingual Spanish-speaking and bilingual) between 1 and 2,5 years of age, and mined their interview transcripts for iamb-shaped words, which were then analyzed acoustically and statistically. They found that the German monolinguals tended to truncate first iambic syllables for a time, which falls in line with the authors’ assumption that they are mentally representing iambs as trochees with unfooted first syllables. The Spanish monolinguals started off producing correct iambs but then backslid somewhat, next producing them trochaically. Some interaction effects were noted, too. However, given that this work was based on data from so few subjects, the results are not definitive but rather may serve as an opening for future research.

This collection makes it clear that no language system should be viewed in isolation, pointing instead the way toward a future in which contact and multilingualism are acknowledged as central to the story of language evolution. This volume will be a useful resource for a number of experts, especially as a review of relevant theoretical issues, and will be particularly welcomed by language contact specialists working on Scandinavian, Germanic and Iberian Romance languages.