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Unraveling multilingualism in times past

The interplay of language contact, language use and language planning

1 Introduction

The study of contact among speakers of different languages or varieties and its linguistic outcomes is flourishing, with frameworks like Van Coetsem (1988) and handbooks like Hickey (2010). A large proportion of the early research on language contact was synchronic, and focused on structural effects of contact. Following more recent work (Braunmüller/Ferraresi 2003a; Kossmann 2013; Schrijver 2014; Stenroos/Mäkinen/Særheim 2012), however, this volume shifts attention to situations of contact in historical settings. In addition, along with structural effects, we take into account the sociolinguistic conditions of contact (Schneider 2007), especially in terms of attitudes, perceptions, ideologies, identity and planning (Hüning/Vogl/Moliner 2012; Peersman et al. 2015; Rouchdy 2002). We are working very much, in other words, in the spirit of much recent work in historical sociolinguistics (Hernández-Campoy/Conde-Silvestre 2012).

In this introductory paper, we draw attention to a set of interlocking issues developed through the course of the contributions to the present volume. First, we lay out some theoretical background both in terms of the empirical challenges and opportunities for historical sociolinguistic work on the multilingual past, and in terms of how structural and social aspects of language variation and change connect in the principle of informational maximalism (section 2). Next, we discuss how we understand multilingualism and contact in relation to the papers in this volume (section 3), followed by some thoughts on language planning in such contexts (section 4). We conclude with some brief closing remarks in section 5.

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2 Challenges and opportunities in historical multilingualism

This section sets up two fundamental challenges for understanding historical settings of multilingualism that run through virtually all the contributions. First, we already pointed at a major issue in understanding language change generally, namely how social and structural aspects connect and interact in the process of change. Long lines of scholars have wrestled with the question of 'internal' *versus* 'external' motivations – that is, of the social versus the structural – but, even if one can occasionally still hear echoes of this tradition, it has long since been set aside as we have moved beyond what Dorian calls "the weakness of simplistic dichotomous thinking" (1993: 152; see Salmons/Purnell 2010: 454 for references and discussion). Second, in recent years, one of most cited phrases in historical linguistics has been Labov's repeated comments that historical linguistics is "making the best of bad data" (e.g. Labov 1972: 100, 1994: 11). This has to be balanced against Janda and Joseph's principle of 'informational maximalism' (Janda/Joseph 2003: 37). Especially in historical sociolinguistics, the challenges of working with 'bad data' are even more pronounced (cf. Auer et al. 2015). Negotiating along these two parameters – social and structural aspects of change on the one hand and limited data and the exploitation of all available data – defines this volume.

The second challenge just mentioned, the so-called 'bad-data problem', is in fact the explicit focus of the papers by McDonald and Litty. As both rightly note, we can deduce a lot more from 'bad data' than most realize, including information along social and structural dimensions. This is exactly what both authors do, with fundamentally different data sets: very small numbers of ancient, short inscriptions with little social context in the case of McDonald, and nineteenth-century letters letters from immigrants and their families for Litty. McDonald shows correlations of variation by text type, rather than the kinds of geographical or chronological patterns one might expect, in "a relatively unusual situation of stable societal bilingualism, in that neither was ever the dominant language of the entire region during the period" in question. Litty's examination of immigrant texts, mostly letters, focuses on difficult interpretations of orthographic variation as a window into phonological variation. The striking confirmation of her analysis comes from historical and current audio recordings, where she is able to follow patterns from writing to speaking. (See Litty 2017 for more elaborate discussion on the subject.)

Other papers especially push forward the edge of what we can get from available evidence on social aspects of change. Braunmüller looks at hidden multilectal patterns, in ways related to recent work on the 'invisibility' and 'invisibilization' of minority languages (see most notably Langer/Havinga 2015), while also delving into matters of acquisition, including second language and second dialect acquisition, which is still not routinely dealt with in the field. Kühl takes a related perspective on

translocated Danish, where two colonial settings, Norway and the Faroe Islands, show very different outcomes, not only socially, but also structurally, and with variable impact on the contemporary linguistic repertoires available in both of these places.

Padilla-Moyano treats the remarkable historical 'crossroads of languages' in the Basque-speaking Soule or *Zuberoa* region, where an ethnically homogenous community has maintained its native tongue over centuries of intense bilingualism and multilingualism – a situation which shapes the particularly distinct variety of Basque spoken there still nowadays. Key structural effects of this contact, he argues, become key markers of sociolinguistic identity for the community over time. That is, social and structural sides of language contact and language change are intimately interwoven, and one cannot be understood without explicit and careful attention to the other.

When we come to language policy and planning, the issues of informational maximalism and the integration of social and structural aspects in multilingual settings do not disappear altogether, but reappear in a different form. Drawing on an underused type of data, school inspection reports, Schoemaker and Rutten are able to generate new insights into the implementation of standard language ideology in education. While the study is framed in policy and planning, the real meat of the discussion comes from metalinguistic comments by school inspectors, identifying particular linguistic features they had observed and their evaluations of them. This provides a very welcome way of connecting policy, attitudes and linguistic features.

Planning and policy show their more public face in Moliner and Ziegler's examination of language choice in a corpus of public announcements. They not only illustrate how language standardization plays out in this context, but also how the status of languages is standardized in a developing nation state. The interrelatedness of corpus planning and status planning in the German in Luxembourg project again emphasizes the need to look at both social and structural aspects of language contact simultaneously.

While all the papers in this volume are working with data that are 'limited' to greater or lesser extents – given the rich results each paper achieves, one can indeed wonder if the label 'bad bata', even when used ironically, is appropriate –, all advance our understanding of the relationship between – and foster the integration of – the social and the structural in settings of historical multilingualism. In a real sense, that integration is a fundamental piece of informational maximalism.

3 Multilingualism and contact

As mentioned above, both the social and structural consequences of language contact figure prominently – and continue to do so – in the young canon of historical

sociolinguistics (cf. Trudgill 2010). Along these lines, our understanding of multilingualism and language contact not only encompasses both the idea of 'contact between languages' as well as the idea of 'contact between speakers of those languages', but tries to integrate these two perspectives. The crux in many of the studies in this volume, as in many of the articles in the *Handbook of historical sociolinguistics* (Hernández-Campoy/Conde-Silvestre 2012), is assessing the impact of the individual mono- or multilingual writer on his or her multilingual society, always admitting that 'bad data' may obscure our insight into the exact type of personal and societal multilingualism at play in a specific case study. And yet, as argued above, the limitations of the original written sources should not keep us from trying to contribute to a further development of typologies of language contact and/or bi-/multilingualism in times past. We therefore explicitly solicited contributions for this volume that pay attention to the interplay between individual and societal multilingualism, both in overt and covert form. This collection further intends to offer glimpses of the social, structural and cognitive consequences of language contact proper or, in other words, of contact between speakers, between languages and language varieties, as well as within speakers.

Both Litty and Kühl illustrate the enormous potential of 'postcolonial' historical settings for furthering insights into structural effects of forced or deliberate migration on language varieties-in-contact. In Litty's study of phonetic transfer in a German/English contact setting in late nineteenth-century Wisconsin, the contact analysis between 'dominant/national varieties' can be scaled down to the level of (no less than seven) traditional dialects of German. Kühl, on the other hand, is able to show how a 'translocated' language (Danish) in two distinct colonial settings (Norway and the Faroe Islands) entered a structurally different developmental process in both cases.

Whereas Litty and Kühl arrive at structural linguistic observations departing from a situation of societal language contact, McDonald accomplishes the opposite in deriving a hypothesis on the multilingual nature of Southern Italy 2000 years ago from small snippets of archaeological textual material. Her analysis of individual code switching in Oscan/Greek text fragments effectively leads to evidence in support of a projection of stable societal bilingualism with a functional spread between the languages concerned.

A correct assessment of the potential influence of a superimposed language or language variety on idiolects in diglossic societies hinges upon our access to the primary sources that built and constituted the scribes' multilingual experience (Rindler Schjerve 2003; Vandenbussche 2004). In this vein, Moliner and Ziegler paint a vivid picture of triglossia in nineteenth-century Luxemburg, showcasing a selection of state-decreed leaflets and posters containing official announcements for the population at large. While the typological nature of this specific contact situation remains difficult to contain within existing models of present-day societal multilingualism,

the primary sources do supply us with all the linguistic information that may have directly influenced and affected the individual writer's sphere.

Schoemaker and Rutten's discussion of contact between competing varieties of (and variants within) the same language – rather than between distinct languages – in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century Netherlands exemplifies a different dimension of speakers' choices between a variety of available repertoires and standards. The power of standard language ideology in their setting of nation-state formation shaped and determined the struggle between 'nature and nurture' – and eventually blotted out all possible contact phenomena in favour of the top-down-imposed prestige features of Standard Dutch.

Padilla-Moyano takes us back to a more traditional account of structural linguistic change following intense contact between Basque and Occitan: he charts suffixal change between the seventeenth and nineteenth century through a detailed analysis of scarce sources, complemented with a well-informed account of the external linguistic history at play. This case study particularly highlights (as do McDonald and Litty) that the quality and depth of the linguistic analysis need not be determined only by the size of the corpus.

Braunmüller's contribution on covert multilingualism serves as the perfect red thread tying up the individual articles and enhancing them as a whole, bringing to the fore a series of cognitive elements underlying each of the sociolinguistic case-studies. Whereas discussions of language contact – both past and present – typically focus on the salient and prominent contact phenomena between the dominant languages involved, the speakers' additional (and often considerable) linguistic repertoire is usually left out of the equation despite its likely interference with overall language-systemic change. The contribution pushes the boundaries of our traditional analytical framework even further, however, in foregrounding the view that the full impact of language change may only be understood when it is no longer regarded as a process of changing systems, but as one of changing norms instead.

4 Historical language planning

Historical language contact is an intriguing field of research for scholars working on language planning and policy, or language management (Spolsky 2004). We adopt the view that multilingualism is the common situation in most historical situations. Even if contact between speakers of different languages was often restricted to specific communities such as urban areas with sizeable in-migration from foreign workers and traders, members of more isolated communities will often still have had some knowledge of and/or experience with other languages or other varieties of their own languages. We consider so-called internal multilingualism, or multidialectalism, that

is, the co-existence of genetically closely related and mutually intelligible varieties, or dialects, to be a case of multilingualism, too (Hüning/Vogl/Moliner 2012).

Questions that naturally follow from any contact situation include: How do the speakers involved perceive each other? What attitudes are triggered in the contact situation? What beliefs and ideologies underpin their perceptions and attitudes? What planning measures are taken to coordinate the contact? Which linguistic forms and varieties are typically promoted through policy, and which are condemned? Thus, historical societal multilingualism, be it the co-existence of different languages such as French and German or multidialectalism, sparked off language management. At the lowest level, the micro-management between individual speakers and the self-correction of historical individuals are obviously beyond historical reconstruction. However, so-called ego-documents such as private letters and diaries provide corrections by language use revealing normative attitudes towards particular variants, also among less-experienced writers (Auer 2008; Fairman 2008).

Official and semi-official planning encompasses policy measures taken by governmental institutions as well as publicly promoted private initiatives. The single most well-known language planning activity in historical contexts may be the European-wide puristic discourse against the most manifest result of language contact, viz. lexical loans. Purism can be easily extended to include morphological and syntactic items, as shown in the contribution by Padilla-Moyano. In a similar vein, the use of 'foreign', 'non-indigenous' letters and diacritics, or of a 'foreign' script can lead to prescriptive interventions and other planning measures (Kramer 2015; Sebba 2007; Tamošiūnaitė 2015; Vosters/Rutten 2015).

Another well-known example of historical language planning is standardization, which necessarily takes place in a multilingual situation. This can be a primarily multidialectal context, as in the case study on the eighteenth and nineteenth-century Netherlands by Schoemaker and Rutten, or it can be a multilingual context, as in the case of Luxembourg, studied by Moliner and Ziegler. Particularly interesting about standardization contexts is that they usually not only involve corpus planning and status planning, but also acquisition planning (Wright 2012). The Dutch case discussed by Schoemaker and Rutten, for example, targets the question to what extent schoolteachers in the nineteenth-century Netherlands were involved in teaching the newly devised national standard at the expense of local dialects.

In Luxembourg, where various standard languages competed with each other, viz. French and German, while Luxembourgish was increasingly seen as a separate language, too, language choice across different domains is a crucial issue. The archival material available to Moliner and Ziegler, while perhaps still sparse for a modern observer, is more than sizeable when compared to the odds and ends analyzed by McDonald in her article on Oscan, an Italic language used in southern Italy from the fifth to the first century BCE. Her detailed analysis of individual, interlocutor-oriented codeswitches, and the conclusion that code-switching and, on a more general level, language choice correlate with specific text types and/or social domains clearly ties

in with research into language choice in modern and more recent historical contexts (Schendl/Wright 2011; Stenroos/Mäkinen/Særheim 2012).

Domain-specific language choices are often related to positive or negative associations with particular social activities and languages. In the domain of religion, for example, speech communities tend to have strong ideas about the acceptability of certain languages. Language choice may thus reveal linguistic ideologies. The hierarchization of varieties is a common effect of multilingual settings, though not always easily reconstructable for historical settings. We can, of course, imagine linguistic hierarchies: well-known examples include Latin, Church Slavonic and French as international languages of prestige in various periods of European history. It is, however, essential to keep in mind that prestige is also domain-specific (cf. Milroy 1992). These languages were typically preferred in writing (religious, scholarly), not necessarily in other types of discourse, let alone in oral communication. It is this type of domain-specific prestige that consolidates multilingual situations. Padilla-Moyano shows that the changing functions of Basque, Latin and French, while originally connected to specific domains, developed into a socially determined diglossic situation, with Basque being associated with 'the people', and Latin (later French) with the upper ranks.

Hierarchization can play a role in language shift, too, although communicative needs may be equally important. Litty discusses the case of German-speaking immigrants in the state of Wisconsin, arriving from the 1830s onward, where the shift to English took at least two or three generations. Again, this strongly depended on the social domains involved and on language planning measures taken in these domains, by church officials, school boards and printers. Kühl compares the historical spread of Danish in Norway and in the Faroes, adopting the Dynamic Model originally developed for the study of postcolonial Englishes (Schneider 2007). The model offers a suitable framework to determine the relative contribution of social and internal factors on historical situations of language contact.

The high status of Danish, which was used in the administration and in church, and in fact developed into the only written language of Norway and the Faroes for a considerable period of time, roughly from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, exemplifies the importance of power. At the same time, the (re-)introduction of Norwegian-based and Faroese writing in the nineteenth century draws attention to identity factors in the age of nationalism. In his paper, Braunmüller discusses the fact that language contact not always leads to convergence, levelling and simplification. Issues of power and identity, including socially shared beliefs about the importance of certain languages, at least in well-defined domains, may foster minority language maintenance and the vitality of non-dominant languages, as well as lead to linguistic divergence. The maintenance of Frisian in the Netherlands and Sorbian in Germany are examples of minority languages being preserved as a result of the identity function to their speakers. The cases of Czech and Slovak, of Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian, perhaps also of Dutch in the Netherlands and Dutch in Belgium may count as

examples of linguistic divergence as a result of sociopolitical divergence, and the effects on processes of identification associated therewith. Such cases are not always the result of (semi-) official planning, or can in fact go against official planning measures, as in the case of Belgian Dutch. Still, they are the result of interpersonal negotiation of individual speakers and the groups they identify with, that is, of language management at the local level of human interaction.

The topics of interpersonal negotiation and of so-called covert multilingualism (*verdeckte Mehrsprachigkeit*), also discussed by Braunmüller, relate to individual multilingualism. Here, we also touch upon an issue in need of more in-depth research. Whereas societal multilingualism and (semi-)official language planning have been on the research agenda at least since Cooper (1989) began his well-known study with the examples of the establishment of the Académie française in the seventeenth century and the revival of Hebrew in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the personal experiences of historical actors, their attitudes and views, and their daily practices in a multilingual environment have attracted much less scholarly attention. An important reason is, without any doubt, the difficulty of accessing the linguistic experiences of historical individuals. The advent of historical sociolinguistics with its strong focus on individual language users and ego-documents may remedy this. In this context, it will be good to keep in mind the relevant observation by Braunmüller and Ferraresi (2003b: 3) that multilingual competence is not something that historical individuals often comment upon since being multilingual was apparently considered to be 'just normal'. "A lack of such linguistic skills would, by contrast, have been worth mentioning" (Braunmüller/Ferraresi 2003b: 3).

However, also on a supra-individual level, the management of multilingual situations is in need of further investigation. The linguistic profile of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Dutch society, for example, is still far from clear (Frijhoff 2015). Whereas a lot is known about language choice in specific domains, neither the repertoires of individuals, nor the practices of groups and networks, nor the (semi-)official planning initiatives to regulate societal multilingualism are very clear. A crucial question in this respect is when, in which context, and why multilingualism stopped being 'just normal', and instead developed into an object of metalinguistic commentary, became integrated into linguistic ideologies, and a focal point of language policy. It is obvious that the rise of nationalism as a social and political ideology, and the concomitant rise of standard language ideology in the eighteenth century (cf. the paper by Schoemaker and Rutten) marks a turning point in this development, but purism, multilingual language guides and comments on language variation and other languages go back further in time, and justify a thorough historical analysis of European multilingualism and the planning activities it gave rise to.

5 Concluding remarks

This volume aims to bring together scholars working at the interface of language contact, language use and language planning, seeking contributions which do not simply focus on contact-induced changes in the grammatical system, but which also account for the sociolinguistic context in which contact arises and persists: looking at how processes of language contact arise bottom-up and/or are steered top-down, taking into account the results of contact between speakers and communities of different varieties, the social relevance of the varieties in contact, as well as the values and salience that were attached to them – integrating, in other words, the impact of language planning and language ideologies on the one hand, and speaker-based attitudes, perceptions and identities on the other hand. Accordingly, we propose that also in the study of historical multilingualism and language contact, the aim should be to move towards analyses of what Silverstein (1985) and Woolard (2008: 436) called the total linguistic fact: a plea for a three-fold study of 'the fundamental datum' for a science of language, viz. first the linguistic form itself, secondly the use of linguistic forms in specific social contexts, and thirdly, human reflection on these forms in use. Connecting all these elements, we argue, is a central challenge to the domain of historical sociolinguistics as well, and each of the case studies in this volume has contributed significantly to this aim.

However, there is still an ongoing need for solid, innovative and bold theory-building in historical sociolinguistics. As mentioned above, we believe it to be crucial to work towards a historical sociolinguistic theory explaining how social and structural aspects connect and interact in change, as one crucial way of applying the principle of informational maximalism and exploiting all available data to the fullest degree. We note that the field is very good at describing detailed case studies challenging the generally accepted borders of what can be known on the basis of selective data. What we often appear to lack, however, is the audacity to challenge established language contact or multilingualism theory on the basis of such microstudies. All understandable academic prudence aside, there still is a lot to be learned today from the revolution that microhistory caused in the field of history proper. We hope that this volume can provide an inspiring beginning for such an enterprise.

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