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BOOK REVIEWS

The Oxford handbook of language contact. ed. Anthony Grant. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019. Pp. 757. https://global.oup.com/academic/product/the-oxford-handbook-of-language-contact-9780199945092?cc=us&lang=en&

Reviewed by George Lang (University of Ottawa, Canada)

A handbook is by implication a vade mecum, a portable compendium to be consulted over time. It is also, in the case of an academic discipline, a freezeframe snapshot of the orientations of those who ascribe to it.

This *Oxford Handbook of Language Contact* (henceforth OHLC) reflects the current state of research in contact linguistics (CL), a multi-disciplinary subdiscipline which encompasses sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics and reaches beyond linguistics itself to anthropology, sociology, history and demography. Weinreich (1953) is understood to have first formulated a unified multidisciplinary approach. Thomason and Kaufman (1988) is another landmark. But, as Anthony Grant states in his introduction to OHLC, the roots of CL go back to the works of Schuchardt (1882, 1883) and Hesseling (1899, 1905). Further adumbrations of present-day theories and research can be found in twentieth-century work on the Balkan Sprachbund, on code-switching, on language shift, and on immigrant languages (OHLC, p. 81).

Many readers of JPCL will be interested in OHLC for the light it throws upon creolistics, though there are probably few creolists who do not have a wider interest in language contact. There is, incidentally, a similarly-named *Blackwell Handbook for Language Contact* edited by Raymond Hickey (2010, 2nd edition, July, 2020), in which many of the contributors to OHLC have also had a hand. In other words, there is at least congruence of personnel, if not agreement, among scholars on the particulars of CL, some of which are raised below.

A handbook should be ecumenical, inclusive of contradictory schools of thought. In this regard, the authors of the articles on "younger" languages – shorthand for pidgins, creoles and mixed languages – are explicit about their own sometimes contested positions. They also provide even-handed information on points of view opposing their own (Parkvall, McWhorter, Smith, and Grant, pp. 261–327). The expressed burden of OHLC is not, however, to sort out or rehash debates on creole genesis or Creole Exceptionalism (p. 296), but rather to establish a overall framework for CL. First come twelve chapters on the implications of linguistic theory for language contact and vice-versa, addressing the usual

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suspects (morphology, syntax, semantics) but also CL-relevant topics like code-switching, first and second language acquisition, bilingualism and the transformations endangered languages undergo. Follows a second section of nineteen case studies ranging across the gamut of world languages. According to Winford, the "unified theory of language contact that we are seeking must integrate the sociolinguistic, the linguistic, and the psycholinguistic aspects of change" (p. 70). Put another way, "contact linguistics [...] is characterized by a disconnect between an essentially synchronic perspective on code-switching, focusing on lexical matters, and an essentially diachronic perspective on contact-induced change, focusing on grammar" (Backus, p. 193). A short review of this nature cannot even begin to do justice to the multiple ways in which OHLC works at resolving these overarching issues and disconnects. So, in the wake of this aforegoing synopsis, I shall restrict myself to addressing a few general points.

In his introduction, Grant draws a distinction between the "changes wrought upon a language system as the result of its speakers coming into contact with users of another language system – we may call this contact-induced linguistic change, or CILC) – rather than to the process(es) by which this outcome occurs" (p. 1). A uniformitarian approach to the topic suggests that all languages are or have been in contact, though evidence of contact may not be available. The fact remains that contact does not automatically produce change, because one of the processes involved in CILC is resistance to the language of others as the result of contempt, enmity or fear, "factors that would discourage the transfer or replication of much or even any linguistic material from one group to another" (p. 2). The pathways for CILC are complex, multifactorial and often obscure. Parkvall's observation about pidgins is thus perhaps also germane to other scenarios of language contact: "pidgins typically develop in settings where all parties have an interest in communicating, and that this pressing need overrides any prescriptive urges ... not a teacher/learner scenario, but rather a situation where everyone involved is clutching at straws" (p. 271).

Sometimes it is linguists, too, who clutch at those straws. Contact linguistics has a "long and confusing [terminological] history" (Andersen, cited by Winford, p. 56). "Borrowing" has had staying power, though "copying" and "adoption" are perhaps more accurate, given that nothing, either morphemes or grammatical schema, is actually *borrowed* and then given back. Another term, "imposition", is understood to reflect inequities of power and prestige between the languages in question, though the term itself would benefit from further refinement. Winford, in his chapter "Theories of Language Contact" (pp. 55), adduces Van Coetsem's notion of *agentivity* to emphasize that relationships between source and recipient languages in contact are not only "macro," i.e. sociological, in nature, but "micro," rooted in the speech behaviour of bilingual individuals.

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According to Winford (p. 57), Van Coetsem's concept of agentivity can be used to distinguish between borrowing (or recipient language agentivity), and imposition (source language agentivity). This shifts the emphasis from sociolinguistics to psycholinguistics, since the dominant language should first be reckoned by reference to the individual's control and use of the languages in question, not by the wider frame of each language's relative sum of power or prestige. What Jean-Louis Calvet (1979) called *glottophagie*, the devouring of languages, is certainly real and a potential outcome of language contact, especially in colonial contexts. Yet, as Aikhkenvald (p. 241) observes in the present volume, language death can be gradual, sudden or radical, due, respectively, to ongoing contact with another, dominant language, to the collective death of its speakers or to political repression. In the last two cases, agentivity in Van Coetsem's sense is increasingly one-sided, since recipient language agentivity is expiring. Yet in the case of gradual decline, room certainly remains for agency.

For example, French is sometimes assumed to be on the wane in Canada, at least in the long-term. It nonetheless impacts Canadian English usage. For example, in the 1970s after French became the official administrative language in Québec, *subvention* for "(research) grant" and *intervention* in the sense of "taking the floor during public proceedings" entered Montreal English, usually pronounced *à l'anglaise*. These loan words would be an example of "imposition" because English speakers usually impose their articulatory habits on imported French terms (per Winford, p. 56). They also exemplify what Clark called "unnecessary borrowing" (cited by Grant, p. 9), since English words expressing those concepts were not absent, though perhaps less so in the second example, for which an easy translation into standard English cannot be found. Speakers were certainly motivated by the renewing prestige of French but also by the cultural pragmatics of needing to show that they understand the "new" rules of the (academic) cultural game.

This is in turn reminiscent of the influence of Italian administrative terms on Süd-Tirol German, often through calquing (ST *dopolavoro* < IT "after" + "work", designates a staff canteen at which to have a drink after work), or through oblique translation (ST *Lebensminimum* < IT *minimo di sussistanza* for which the standard German is *Existenzminimum*; see Zebe 2014). Note that recipient ST German is usually thought to be the declining language, unlike the recipient language in the Montreal example, English – though at that time many anglophones were persuaded that English was under dire threat.

Gradual obsolescence leading to shift, loss and language death may seem a teleologic concept, but the actual process remains atelic until it is over. That is, it is even reversible. Languages sometimes rise again like a phoenix, sometimes as a

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different bird than the one which first plunged into the flames. Middle English is a case in point.

This is the moment to suggest that there is to this day even in the field of CL an implicit monolingual bias, as if there is a zero sum game among languages, a permanent *floating* lack of meaning anytime one language is measured or at least compared with another. In his work on bilingualism, Grosjean (2010) has repeatedly drawn attention to this bias (cited by Baptista, Veiga, Da Costa et al. in their discussion contrasting code-switching and borrowing in Capeverdian Crioulo [pp. 713–739]).

The key conundrum of CL is how and why languages change when there is contact between and among them (and contact, like Santa Claus, is everywhere, everywhere). The mass of material in OHLC naturally deals with external, contact-induced language change (CILC) and usually in terms of changes produced rather than processes of change, much more difficult to reckon. Yet much language change is internal, a process in which driving forces can be constrained by limits and conditions, hierarchies or scales of borrowing, of the kind Grant discusses in the volume.

On other hand, internal, unmotivated changes are sometimes random, aleatory or stochastic. Contact sets the grounds for borrowing and imposition, but change can occur spontaneously and without any apparent predetermined direction or goal. The reciprocal implications of contact linguistics and the emerging field of evolutionary linguistics, which turns around mutations akin to genetic ones are just beginning to be explored (see Newberry et al. 2017).

These are but a few of the issues which OHLC provides a wealth of matter for reflection upon. Although any handbook is likely to be read from beginning to end only by its authors, editors and reviewers, this one can profitably be read as a unit. It deserves a place on the shelves of any serious linguist, whether concerned with contact or not.

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Address for correspondence

George Lang
University of Ottawa
42 Frost
Irvine, CA 92617
USA
xerxeslang@gmail.com

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