

A typology of contact-induced changes in passive constructions

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A primary concern of language contact research is the modelling of contact-induced changes. Morphosyntactic change as a result of language contact is not only understudied but also often treated as part of individual case studies, thus lacking a bigger picture perspective. The findings reported in this talk outline the complexity and variety of contact-induced changes in passive constructions. The implications of those findings address central questions in (historical) contact linguistics, e.g. hierarchies of borrowability and the role of typology.

With the goal of a general typology of contact-induced changes in mind, I present a typology of morphosyntactic changes in passive constructions within the matter-pattern replication framework (Matras & Sakel 2007a; Gardani 2020). Based on a comparative analysis of over 20 contact scenarios involving geographically, genealogically, and typologically diverse languages, I map out the possible outcomes of contact-induced change to passive constructions generally and to the smaller constructional components, e.g. the verb phrase or the oblique agent phrase. The outcomes cover the spectrum of possibilities: The outright borrowing of passive verbal morphology (e.g. RL: Colloquial Singaporean English – SL: Malay [Bao & Wee 1999]), the structural development of a periphrastic passive (e.g. RL: Chontal Maya – SL: Spanish [Montgomery-Anderson 2010]), the overall emergence of a passive construction (e.g. RL: Basque – French/Gascon [Haase 1992]), and the addition of an oblique agent phrase to the construction (e.g. RL: Lou – SL: Hausa [Palancar 2002: 18]) – to name just a few.

Apart from showcasing a typology of contact-induced changes to a basic pattern of language structure, this talk makes three additional points. First, while uncommon changes can occur – suggesting that there are no absolute linguistic constraints on what can be changed and how – the empirical evidence shows that pattern replication is dominant in the passive domain, lending support to Matras and Sakel's (2007b: 844) observation that "some categories seem to resist MAT [matter replication] but attract PAT [pattern replication]". Second, certain subtypes of pattern replication seem to be associated with the written register, e.g. increase or decrease in usage frequency and productivity, while others more commonly occur in spoken contexts, e.g. changes in the order of constituents. These putative associations suggest that different mechanisms and processes are at play for the different types of changes. Third, I speak to the debated question of whether typological distance and genetic relatedness are key factors in contact-induced change. Rather than focussing on typology, I propose that considerations of 'psychotypology' are more fruitful (cf. Kellerman 1978). It appears that replication can occur between subsystems that are different from a typological standpoint if they are perceived as similar by language users.

By understanding and modelling contact-induced changes for a basic subsystem in language, that was long deemed resistant to the effects of contact, this contribution moves us closer toward the greater goal: A typology of contact-induced changes in morphosyntax and beyond.

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