Stability and divergence in language contact. Factors and mechanisms.

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Summary

This edited volume highlights certain types of language contact processes that have often been overlooked or neglected, namely that languages or dialects in contact do not converge, i.e. that they either remain stable or diverge from each other in diachronic development. The contributions explore the sociolinguistic and structural factors and mechanisms that lead to stability and divergence despite language contact. The contributions cover a wide range of language contact situations, including standard and non-standard varieties.
The volume is divided into two parts: theoretical aspects and empirical studies of the factors providing stability and/or convergence, as well as the conditions that are especially favourable for linguistic divergence.

In "Linguistic stability and divergence: An extended perspective on language contact", Karoline Kühl and Kurt Braunmüller outline the conditions for linguistic stability and divergence in language contact situations by reviewing the factors and mechanisms that are relevant for both language change and stability. The terms 'convergence' and 'divergence' are used to denote diachronic processes and results that increase or decrease inter-systemic similarities in language contact situations. Stability is defined as the stage when change no longer happens, or when it never occurred. Languages or varieties may converge or diverge as a whole, or they may converge or diverge in some of their features, or in bundles of features, but also in certain registers and to different degrees. Convergence and divergence may occur sequentially, intertwined or even simultaneously, while some linguistic features converge towards another variety. The basic assumption is that multilingual speakers are the source of all outcomes of language contact. Cognitive aspects of multilingual processing are crucial for the types of development that may occur. In order to explain why and how varieties change, the notion of multiple causation has been employed (Thomason and Kaufman 1988). To summarize important factors in language variation and change, language contact can be said to vary due to time (prolonged vs. short-term), stability (stable vs. sporadic) and circumstances (i.e. trade, institutions, education, intermarriage patterns, religion), and due to their occurrence in social and sociolinguistic settings (small vs. large community, dense vs. tightly-knit social groups, high degree of contact vs. isolation, diglossic distribution, different domains of usage and varying degrees of functional strength). These extra-linguistic differences create certain kinds and degrees of individual multilingualism which in turn are influenced by the conditions of language acquisition. The typological closeness between the languages in contact does not seem to be a decisive factor with regard to various possibilities of borrowing and calquing. As long as social conditions are favourable, no features seem to be impossible to borrow. The perception of interlingual equivalences, as well as the creation of common patterns by the speakers (regardless of their typological origin) explain stability and convergence in language contact without referring to extra-linguistic factors. Both convergence and stability of common features are cognitively undemanding choices in bilingual language use. Divergence, on the other hand, is a cognitively demanding task and needs additional motivation, involving language prestige and attitudes. Demographic, geographic and political factors also play a role. Thus, the authors discuss language-internal, language-external (i.e. contact) and extra-linguistic (i.e. political and economic factors, prestige and attitudes) factors and mechanisms as dimensions that shape the contact setting and thereby set the stage for multilingual speakers' linguistic behaviour. Standardisation and stability go hand in hand, where the standard language plays the role of a roofing language that covers not only regional or social varieties, but also styles and registers. The authors propose a classification of types of development with regard to stability and divergence as: a) contact-induced stability; b) stability despite contact; c) contact-induced divergence; and d) divergence despite contact.

In "Convergence vs. divergence from a diassociative perspective", Steffen Höder gives both a theoretical and data-based survey of issues related to convergence and divergence, contrasting his data from present-day varieties of Low German with the standard German spoken in the northernmost parts of Germany. As opposed to diachronic stability, convergence and divergence can be said to constitute types of relational diachronic language change in which two or more given languages become structurally more similar or dissimilar (Weinreich 1954). Convergence and divergence do not imply bidirectionality. Moreover, they do not have to affect whole languages, but can also cause the emergence of new varieties. For example, the contact between Standard German and Low German in Northern Germany resulted in the establishment of a new regiolect of High German (North High German), a converged variety, while the remainder of the High German varieties did not undergo similar changes. Thirdly, convergence and divergence can be restricted to specific parts of the language system and apply to different aspects of linguistic structure. The author proposes a classification of convergent/divergent changes taking into account type (convergence, divergence), role of contact (none or contact-induced), directionality (bidirectional or unidirectional), affected system (whole language or emerging variety), part of system (e.g. verbal syntax) and structural aspect (form or function). Since the locus of language contact is the multilingual speaker, language contact and contact-induced change have at least two dimensions, namely a cognitive and a social one, and involve both individual speakers and speaker groups. Pro-diassociative changes result in an overall reduction of interlingual idiosyncrasies and give way to interlingual (simplifying) 'short-cuts' within the systems of bi-/multilingual speakers. Counter-diassociative changes...
lead to an increase in idiosyncrasies and a decrease in common structures within the brains of bi-/or multilinguals.

Part II. starts with the contribution on "Stability and convergence in case marking: Low and High German" by Kristian Berg, who discusses the relationship between Standard/High German as spoken in Northern Germany, and two Low German varieties (as spoken in Emstek, Northern Lower Saxony, and Bad Laer, Westphalia) concerning the use of the definite article. Generally, Low German is losing most of its native speakers, and converges more and more with standard German, integrating many morphological and syntactic features of the roofing language. But there also seem to be exceptions, as instances of stability. Berg's data clearly show that the traditional oblique case marking still exists in Low German varieties, keeping up at least some overt diverging features between Low and High German. On the other hand, the easiest way to reduce the distances between the two languages is to use morphologically reduced forms, which narrow the gap between these languages, introducing new dative case markers into Low German. Thus, divergence co-occurs with (morphological) stability.

In "Towards a typological classification of Judeo-Spanish: Analysing syntax and prosody of Bulgarian judezmo" Susann Fisher, Christopher Gabriel and Elena Kireva show that stability and divergence, on the one hand, and convergence on the other, may co-occur in language contact situations. They analyse a typical contact language, Judeo-Spanish, as it is still spoken by emigrant Spanish Jews who have been living in Sofia (Bulgaria) since their expulsion from Spain in 1492. The authors focus on syntax and prosody and find that as far as syntax and word order are concerned, Sofian Judeo-Spanish is almost identical to modern Spanish, with some relics of late-medieval Spanish. Thus, the syntax of this variety displays stability despite language contact, accompanied by two diverging features: stylistic fronting and the use of post-verbal clitics in narrative inversion, which are no longer possible in Modern Spanish (or in Modern Bulgarian). On the other hand, the phonology of Judeo-Spanish indicates a heavy impact from the surrounding and dominant Bulgarian, both in its segmental and prosodic aspects, which is a clear case of convergence due to intense language contact. Both areas of this study are tested as to grammaticality/acceptability. The authors conclude that syntax and word order seem to be more stable in contact situations than phonological features. Since Judeo-Spanish was not a prestige language and therefore never learned by anyone outside the Sephardic community, its syntax was never simplified due to imperfect second language learning (Trudgill 2010). As to phonology, the speakers might have used two distinct phonologies, and after some time, a complete convergence of the two systems took place so that the Judeo-Spanish speakers of today make use of only one phonological system, namely the Bulgarian one, as a result of complete convergence on the phonological level.

The contribution, "Despite or because of intensive contact? Internal, external and extralinguistic aspects of divergence in modern dialects and ethnolects of Dutch" by Frans Hinskens, focuses on several aspects of dialectal divergence in Dutch as spoken in the Netherlands and in (northern) Belgium. The paper opens with a discussion of some key notions such as dialect convergence, dialect divergence and hyperdialectism. Subsequently, a two-pronged hypothesis is put forward according to which a) divergence is a multi-causality phenomenon, and b) if they apply, social psychological mechanisms do not stand alone. Findings from recent empirical studies of modern non-standard varieties of Dutch enable this hypothesis to be tested. In connection with the question of whether convergence or divergence has occurred, real time (diachronic) or apparent time ('micro-diachronic') data are required for at least one of the systems studied. In each of the four case studies this requirement is fulfilled. The first case study deals with dialect levelling in Rimburg (in the district of Limburg), situated very close to the Dutch-German border, where the erosion of most local dialectal features can be observed. The dialects of Dutch form a regional koiné. The next study shows how the loss of post-vocalic r emerges in three geographically distant Dutch-speaking areas. The north-eastern and the central dialects show that r-deletion is productive and widens the distance to the roofing Dutch standard language. Dialectal divergence can also be observed in the Dutch-Belgian border region, which is analysed in the third case study. Since the independence of Belgium in 1830, the national border has developed into a water-shed between these two countries. The fourth case study analyses the ethnolectal variation of /z/ in Amsterdam and Nijmegen, both with immigrants of Moroccan and Turkish descent. The data show features that are not part of the 'white' Dutch speakers' diasystem. In conclusion, Hinskens corroborates the idea that there is no divergence without convergence. Divergence in one dimension implies convergence in another dimension. Three types of motivation for divergence can be distinguished: first, structural properties of the relevant varieties of Dutch are never the only motivation for divergence; second, contact, i.e. external motivations often play a role; third, socio-psychological motives seem to play a role in
situations in which internal and/or external factors apply. Thus, divergence often has external motivations which are usually ‘boosted’ by internal ones, and social psychological forces presuppose internal and/or external motivations. While hyperdialectism type 1 is introduced intentionally by L1 speakers in order to dissociate from speakers of a related variety, type 2 is introduced unintentionally by L2 speakers who overgeneralize morphologically conditioned or lexicalized rules due to incomplete bilingual acquisition.

In “Stability in Chinese and Malay heritage languages”, Suzanne Aalberse and Francesca Moro deal with heritage speakers of Chinese and Malay living in the Netherlands in order to show the distinction between stability in form and stability in function. They focus on the domains where stability causes divergence between several co-occurring varieties. Research of heritage speakers gives insights into early bilingual acquisition and the consequences of not getting enough input, as well as into the role of the dominant local language. Moreover, the linguistic competence of these speakers seems to be restricted to informal colloquial registers only. The authors show how contact-induced hyperextension of form leads to an increase in the use of one single form that seems to be the most general/universal. Contrary to other researchers, they found that indeterminacy does not always lead to a loss of that form, but may rather cause hyperextension. As a result, the varieties of heritage speakers are more generalised and/or restricted with respect to the production of the base-line speakers. Unbalanced bilingualism opens the door for a stabilisation of what has been acquired early, which leads to divergence from native language acquisition.

The contribution “Does convergence generate stability? The case of the Cypriot Greek koiné” by Stavroula Tsipplakou investigates the diglossic situation between Standard Greek and Cypriot Greek in Cyprus where the local vernacular represents a mixed koiné that shows a significant degree of convergence with Standard Greek, especially as far as inflectional morphology and the lexicon are concerned. Standard Modern Greek is still the prestige variety and there is still functional differentiation depending on domain of use (public vs. private, formal vs. informal). The main point of the contribution is the long-lasting stability of the Cypriot vernacular and its stable divergence from Standard Modern Greek in a situation where other dialects have largely been levelled out. A reason for this is that the local vernacular has high covert prestige among the indigenous population, which prevents its convergence with standard Greek. Overt phonological convergence to the standard does not take place, although surface morphological tendencies of convergence are obvious. The adoption of the (surface) standard morphology can be explained as a result of schooling, but there still seems to be a larger amount of divergence from the Greek standard to arrest the de-dialectalisation occurring elsewhere in the Greek-speaking world.

In “Gender and noun inflection: The fate of ‘vulnerable’ categories in Northern Norwegian” Hilde Sollid, Philipp Conzett and Åse Mette Johansen investigate whether changes in the gender system and the noun inflection in northern Norwegian varieties due to intense language contact can be detected. Their analyses are based on the Nordic Dialect Corpus and their own research, especially that undertaken in Manndalen and Sappen in the district of Nord-Troms. The authors tested the hypothesis that language contact leads to grammatical simplification, especially when the languages come from different language families, in this case the Germanic Northern Norwegian dialects and the standard (with gender marking) on the one hand, and the two Finno-Ugric languages, Sámi and Kven (without gender marking) on the other. This hypothesis cannot be corroborated, although there are indications of unsystematic variation and simplification. The authors successfully applied methods from creole linguistics, second-language research and stratificational dialectology to show that non-real changes with respect to the use of gender markers can be found. The three-gender system in the vernaculars, as generally used in Norwegian, has not been given up, and the noun inflection is still very similar to the traditional varieties encountered in Northern Norway. Some levelling processes occur, but they do not affect the system in its foundations. Therefore the authors conclude that gender has not dissolved via language contact in multilingual settings, so that it represents a case of stability. The same can be said about the noun inflection system, where instances of divergence can be seen. Thus, language contact and multilingualism do not always lead to simplification, reduction and convergence. Stability and even divergence may also be the results.

The contribution “Dialect stability and divergence in southern Spain: Social and personal motivations” by Juan A. Villena-Ponsoda and Antonio M. Avila-Muñoz presents a detailed survey of the contact situation between local varieties in Andalusia (especially in Malaga) and the Castilian standard. Special emphasis is placed on social variables
and the issue of why low-prestige dialects can survive, despite the high impact of national or regional varieties. They also propose a model for the diglossia in Andalusia and emphasise the strong-tie local communities and their low degree of external contacts. Analysis of individual motivations should constitute the final stage of an integrated theory of social dialect variation including the following steps: 1) social stratification (Labov 2001), 2) social network (Milroy 1980), 3) interactive status/network (Milroy and Margrain 1980) and 4) the speaker's social life (Labov and Harris 1986). Moreover, the motivations for non-convergence in the southern Spanish dialects were investigated, with special emphasis on local loyalty, age, sex, social class, immigration and minority speech patterns. Finally, the authors conclude that the large amount of internal variation is due to the persistence of vernacular speech patterns, and that the low-prestige speech features correlate with covert prestige and the social network in which the speaker lives.

In “The Bergen dialect splits in two” Helge Sandøy, Ragnhild Lie Anderson and Maria-Rosa Doublet present an interesting instance of dialectal divergence within the Norwegian city of Bergen. Contrary to expectations, local varieties do not converge as in the capital, Oslo (dialectal levelling), but develop in opposite directions. The study comprises two areas, Bergen and the Fana Centre, and compares the situation between 1978 and 2010. On the basis of broad data samples, the authors elaborate that, despite intense contact, there are two opposite trends in the city of Bergen: a) Bergen strengthened salient low-status forms, while b) Fana Centre now prefers the corresponding high-status forms. Social segregation can be held responsible for this dialectal split: people now living in Fana wish to highlight linguistically the obvious social change that has taken place, which results in the increasing use of hyperdialectal forms. Bergen, and not the capital, Oslo, still represents the source of potential innovations.

The contribution “Diachronic convergence and divergence in differential object marking between Spanish and Portuguese” Hans-Jörg Döhla deals with the bifurcating change in differential object marking (DOM) between the two languages. The main part of the research is devoted to the divergent historical development of this referential marking. The corpus-based analysis has its starting point in the High Middle Ages, showing that, in Portuguese, DOM reaches its culmination in the 17th century, and fades out in the modern spoken Portuguese, where it is totally absent. In Spanish, however, there is a continuous increase in using DOM, which means that both Iberian languages are completely divergent as far as DOM is concerned. This is explained by a high level of bilingualism among Portuguese intellectuals at the time when DOM constructions entered Portuguese texts, thus narrowing the gap between two similar vernaculars. Thus bilingualism may trigger convergence, while nationalism tends to favour linguistic divergence. Interlingual ‘short-cuts’ that were beneficial when Portuguese intellectuals admired the Spanish language and culture were given up, together with bilingualism. Nationalism can be pinpointed as the ultimate cause of the breakdown of these translinguistic bridges, paving the way for linguistically divergent constructions, which ultimately resulted in a new linguistic norm.

EVALUATION

While nineteenth-century studies of historical development of languages mostly focused on divergence, modern contact linguistics has mainly concentrated on convergence as a result of language contact. Kaufmann (2010:481) claims that “divergence (...) in language contact...is probably a rare element” (2010: 48), while Backus (2004: 180) notices that “stability in structure (...) is an overlooked but important topic in any theory of change”.

Due to its innovative approach and its focus on stability and divergence in diachronic development as two under-researched phenomena, this book occupies an outstanding position in the existing literature on contact linguistics, presenting cutting-edge research on the phenomena under investigation. The authors convincingly show that both stability and divergence occur not only independently of language contact, but also as its direct outcome, taking into account both sociolinguistic and structural factors and mechanisms. Each chapter has made an important contribution to advancing our understanding of factors and mechanisms underlying stability and divergence in language contact.

This edited volume is very well organized, with a theoretical introduction outlining the issues that are supported by evidence provided in the empirical studies. The contributions are grouped around the topics of stability as a source of divergence, partial convergence that may create stable divergence, stability and divergence in language contact, dialect stability and divergence from the standard language, dialect divergence and language divergence. Each
chapter begins with an abstract and contains clearly stated research questions and procedures followed by well-presented findings and conclusions.

Overall, this is a highly relevant, excellently researched and well-edited book which will certainly inspire future research. It represents an important contribution to the understanding of divergence and stability in language contact and will be an invaluable resource for researchers on contact linguistics, sociolinguistics, and contact induced variation and change.

REFERENCES


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