

Patterns of language contact within and across phylogenies

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A long-standing debate in historical linguistics concerns the question how language change progresses. Two competing models were proposed in the 19th century: the tree model (Schleicher 1853) and the wave model (Schuchardt 1870; Schmidt 1872). Although there are good reasons to regard these models as complementary rather than oppositional, they represented an opposition at the time, and often have been presented as opposed, mutually exclusive models since. This has led to quite separate traditions in historical linguistics that focus on inheritance on the one hand, and contact on the other.

One consequence of this is that the empirical basis for theories of contact-induced change is skewed towards situations involving unrelated or distantly related languages. This is perhaps especially apparent in areal linguistics, which clearly focuses on areas with unrelated or distantly related languages, excluding – sometimes by definition (see e.g. Aikhenvald & Dixon 2001) – contact between closely related languages.

With this workshop we would like to explore whether there are systematic differences between contact-induced areal patterns in contact situations involving (closely) related languages on the one hand, and unrelated or distantly related languages on the other? We would like to focus on the following two related general questions:

Are there systematic differences between contact involving (closely) related languages on the one hand, and unrelated or distantly related languages on the other?

In spite of Thomason and Kaufman's (1988) famous claim that, linguistically speaking, anything is possible in language contact, general tendencies have been established, e.g. in the borrowability of types of words, or features of language (see e.g. Moravcsik 1978, Curnow 2001, Field 2002, Matras & Sakel 2007, Haspelmath & Tadmor 2009, Dediu & Cysouw 2013).

Given that related languages are generally more similar to each other than unrelated languages, transfer of features from one variety to another can be expected to be easier than with unrelated languages. Moreover, a higher degree of mutual intelligibility may facilitate communication between speakers, increasing the intensity of contact. When it comes to dialects in contact, similarity between such closely related languages is considered to be a factor facilitating contact as well as a result of contact. Furthermore, phylogenetic and geographic distance tend to correlate (Bowerman 2013). These factors can have consequences for what is possible in language contact. This raises a number of questions about potential systematic differences between contact between related versus unrelated languages, such as:

- Is borrowability influenced by relatedness and/or typological distance?

- Are differences in contact between related and unrelated languages more apparent in specific subsystems of language (phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicon)?
- Are certain features in language families inherently stable or prone to contact-induced change, regardless of the specific contact situation?
- What is the effect of typological similarity in contact situations (i.e. both in contact situations involving related languages and those involving unrelated languages)?
- What are the distributions and propensities of matter and pattern borrowing (Matras & Sakel 2007), respectively?

To what extent do we need separate methodologies for studying contact situations between related and unrelated languages?

Detecting contact signals rests on establishing similarities between languages that are spoken closely together, which cannot be explained by parallel development due to universal pressures or genetic inheritance. Detecting contact effects between related languages is made more difficult because of the dominant presence of genetic inheritance as a source of similarity, and rests heavily on exceptions to established regular change. This also raises a number of questions:

- To what extent do we have to interpret patterns of similarity differently if the languages are related or not?
- To what extent can we use a single approach to detecting contact signals across all types of situations?
- To what extent is geographical proximity between languages (areality) a justified assumption for detecting contact signals?
- To what extent is regularity, or lack thereof, a reliable baseline for distinguishing contact from inheritance?

We invite contributions that address these and related questions, to submit an abstract for a 20-minute presentation of maximally 300 words by **November 11** to anja.hasse@ds.uzh.ch notification of acceptance: November 16.

Since this workshop is intended to be part of the annual meeting of the SLE (Leipzig, 21-24 August, www.sle2019.eu), it needs to go through a preliminary round of evaluation. If the proposal is successful, the participants will be asked to submit a full abstract.

Important dates:

Internal deadline workshop proposal: November 11

Notification of inclusion in the workshop: November 16

Notification of acceptance for workshop: December 15

Deadline submission full abstract if workshop proposal is successful: January 15

References

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