# In Contact with Contact Linguistics

*Opener*

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**[F]** *Als Mitglied habe ich folgende Frage: Vor allem in Interviews taucht in der letzten Zeit bei Fragen, die verneint werden, nicht mehr die Antwort **Nein** auf, sondern die gekünstelte Antwort **Nicht wirklich**. Ist **nicht wirklich** durch ein Zitat zum geflügelten Wort geworden, oder rührt der zunehmende Gebrauch dieser Formulierung von einer Eindeutschung aus dem Englischen her (**not really**)?*

**[A]** Der Ausdruck *nicht wirklich* ist tatsächlich heute allenthalben zu vernehmen, und man könnte von einer »Modephrase« sprechen. Eine genaue Ursprungszuordnung, womöglich aufgrund eines bekannten Zitats, können wir nicht vornehmen, aber es gibt etliche plausible Hinweise darauf, dass hier der englische Ausdruck *not really* zugrunde liegt. […].

(http://gfds.de/nicht-wirklich/)

This extract from the 'Questions and Answers Section' of the *Gesellschaft für Deutsche Sprache* (GfdS: n.p.), the Association for the German Language, which gives recommendations concerning current usages in German and is known for its rather conservative attitudes towards language change and particularly the influence of English on German, nicely illustrates, how a language – in this case German – actually can be enriched by borrowing words or phrases from another language. Using a rather literal translation of English 'not really' to decline an offer is far more indirect than simply saying 'Nein' (No!), and – as is explained by the person answering the question – thus "brings to light nuances" (GfdS: n.p.), which could possibly also be expressed by German phrases such as *eher nicht* or *eigentlich nicht*. However, as it seems to me, *nicht wirklich* in German is still a weaker and more polite form of a simple negation.

I frequently use this extract with my students to discuss various concepts of Clyne's terminological framework of transference "where the form, feature or construction has been taken over by the speaker from another language, whatever the motives or explanation for this" (Clyne 2003: 76). Probably, this is an instance of *pragmatic transference*, i.e. "the transference of pragmatic patterns" (Clyne 2003: 79) from English, introducing a more indirect negation strategy into German and, hence, avoiding what is typically referred to as German explicitness (or bluntness) by people who may be differently socialized. When discussing this phrase in class, I usually point out to my students with a twinkle in the eye that the expression actually dates back to the year 1985, when I – having just come back from a stay in the US as an exchange student – used (or rather 'created') it in a conversation with a friend, who immediately reacted to it and pointed out to me that this

was 'not a German phrase' and that I should stop inserting English into my German all the time. However, he must have picked it up and subsequently propagated the expression because of its apparent usefulness. And here we are: *nicht wirklich* seems to have made it into the German language, being used without hesitation and completely unnoticed by most younger speakers of the language.

This episode of my teenage days also illustrates nicely that spending a considerable period of time in an environment in which a different language from the one you usually speak is used, may have tremendous effects even on the use of your native home language. Because I remember that my German had been 'Americanized' at all levels of language production and that – much to my teachers' dismay – I even had difficulties pronouncing some German words, let alone produce complex and grammatically correct phrases.[1] It is from those days on that I have been intrigued by languages and, as became clear to me later, language contact and contact linguistics for that matter.

Contact Linguistics can be defined as the scientific study of different ways of one language's influence on another language (or on other languages) in situations in which people (or groups of people) speaking the languages involved interact with each other. This may involve the study of linguistic structures, focusing on the language system, but it may as well concern itself with linguistic and social practices, putting the focus on the speakers and their linguistic behaviour. Both aspects may be approached from a synchronic perspective only but they may also be combined with questions of language change and other diachronic issues. Contact linguistics is, by definition, an interdisciplinary field of research which "employs an eclectic methodology that draws on various approaches, including the comparative-historical method, and various areas of sociolinguistics" (Winford 2003: 9). And I fully agree with Donald Winford that "[i]t is this very interdisciplinary approach that defines it and gives it its strength" (Winford 2003: 9). In addition, there are a wide array of linguistic phenomena and processes that can be (and have been) studied in this linguistic subdiscipline. These include various cultural, social, individual, psychological and interactional aspects of bi- or multilingualism, most notably the development of a number of very different definitions and influential models of code-switching (cf., e.g., Clyne

2003: 70-92, and Matras 2009 for an overview and discussion). But they also include the creation of new contact languages such as pidgins, creoles, and mixed languages, which "have for the last century been a focus of interest because of how they challenge various theories of language" (Velupillai 2015: 1).

As it seems, the fact that people may speak several languages and that parts of one language may be inserted into another one has been attested since ancient times, but language contact or contact linguistics as a field of study did not seem to be a matter of scientific interest until the end of the nineteenth century, mainly because of the changes in the natural sciences and the development of historical comparative linguistics (Oskaar 1996: 1-2). "During the heyday of historical linguistic scholarship in the nineteenth century, research on language contact became an integral part of the field and played a vital role in debate [sic] over the nature of language change." (Winford 2003: 6) It contributed to the debate on the family tree model of genetic relationships among languages, as this model "was compromised [...] by the growing evidence that many languages contained a mixture of elements from different source languages" (Winford 2003: 6). Eventually this led to the develop-

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[1]   Maybe, as an explanation for younger readers: In those days it was unbelievably expensive even to phone abroad, communication modes such as skyping did not exist, and I had virtually neither spoken nor heard any German for several months.

ment of "a strong tradition of research in contact-induced change, both within the ambit of Historical Linguistics and in other disciplines" (Winford 2003: 7).

As a linguist who primarily works with and on the English language, an interest in contact linguistics cannot (and should not) be avoided, because "the English language has been contact-derived from its very beginnings" (Hundt & Schreier 2013: 1). This is why we teach our students in introductory courses to diachronic linguistics that

> Throughout its recorded history, the English language has been known to have absorbed linguistic influences of all kinds from other languages, such as Latin, Scandinavian and French, in particular. Indeed, it is this permeable nature of English that has often been put forward as a major factor explaining the spread of English all over the world and its present-day status as a *lingua franca*. (Filppula et al. 2008: 1)

However, this probably did not become immediately clear to me in my rather traditional *Introduction to Diachronic Linguistics* as an undergraduate student at Freiburg University. Nevertheless, my first conscious encounter with contact linguistics in an academic environment dates back to my days as a graduate student of English and

French studies at the same university, a couple of semesters later. Attending an introductory class in Pidgin and Creole studies given by Christian Mair from the English Department and Ralph Ludwig from the Department of Romance Languages, I learnt that these languages were not unsystematic, corrupt or deviant versions of other languages, but were highly fascinating languages worth studying in their own right. I realized that their history can teach us a lot, both about the development of language as such and about processes of language contact that affect basically every language, albeit to different degrees. Until then, the term 'pidgin' had only been known to me as an insult used by one of my teachers of English at high school to refer to the type of language produced by some of his pupils, which he considered unsatisfactory, inadequate or grammatically incorrect. Ralph Ludwig and Christian Mair, however, made me become so fascinated by this area of linguistics that, after graduating from university, I happily spent four years of my lifetime on a sociolinguistic study on the Cameroonian variety of West African Pidgin English, leading to a doctoral thesis and its subsequent publication as Schröder (2003).

Without this book, much of my professional career in academia probably

would not have been possible, and I have continued to investigate and research other aspects of language contact in other (geographical) areas, including other contact languages (cf. Schröder & Rudd fc.; Schröder 2007). And although language contact can be observed virtually anywhere and thus also close to home (as the little episode at the beginning of this opener illustrates), my research interest has allowed me to travel to wonderful places and, recently, has taken me to multilingual and multiethnic Namibia (cf., e.g., Kautzsch & Schröder fc. 2016). It has also allowed me to collaborate with many wonderful colleagues, and to investigate virtually all levels of linguistic description. This includes, most recently, also pragmatic issues in a project on *The Pragmatics of Namibian English* with Klaus P. Schneider and hence also the question of 'pragmatic transference' (see above).

Furthermore, I was very fortunate to have been able to pass on my passion to undergraduate and graduate students in a number of classes on language contact, contact languages and multilingualism at several universities throughout my professional life. I started most of these classes with the following quote, which aptly summarizes why contact linguistics is

worthwhile concerning oneself with, as it comprises almost all facets of our discipline:

> … language contact is a multidimensional, multidisciplinary field in which interrelationships hold the key to the understanding of how and why people use language/s the way they do. This includes interrelations between the structural linguistic, sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic; between typology and language use; between macro- and micro-dimensions; between variation and change; between synchrony and diachrony; between linguistic and sociological, demographic and political. Languages in contact are, after all, the result of people in contact […]. The analysis of language contact data can also throw light on how language is processed as well as on how language changes. (Clyne 2003: 1)

For me as a lecturer the fun of teaching contact linguistics is that it opens up many avenues for students to get interested in linguistics as such. It easily attracts those students who are fascinated by theoretical discussions and very abstract linguistic issues, but it may also attract those who may be less linguistics-inclined because the field may be approached from a very personal and 'close to life and the people' perspective, as outlined by Clyne (2003) in the quote above. It is this latter approach, linking language

contact to the contact of people/s (see also Schröder 2016), which has enabled me to see students of literary and cultural studies also become intrigued by (contact) linguistics. In the Department of British and American Studies at Bielefeld University, we have consequently established an interdisciplinary module in the MA programme which – under the title of 'Contact Zones and Intercultural Studies'[2] – combines literary and cultural studies with linguistics to investigate contacts between people/s and cultures. In a similar spirit, our department met for a lecture series on various aspects and consequences of migration, which eventually led to the publication by Hartner & Schulte (2016).

In the past, there have been a number of handbooks (e.g., Goebl et al. 1996), landmark publications on language contact, such as Thomason (2001) and Thomason & Kaufmann (1988), or introductions to pidgin and creole studies, for example Romaine (1988), Arends et al. (1995), Mühlhäusler (1997), Sebba (1997) and Holm (2000), which have become classics and are still used in any class (and many scientific publications for that matter) on the topic. These have been accompanied more recently by compre-

hensive volumes and textbooks, such as Bakker & Matras (2013), Matras (2009), as well as Velupillai (2015), and handbooks (e.g., Hickey 2010), to name but a few. But in the last few years, we have also seen the publication of a number of relevant linguistic atlases, most notably WAVE by Kortmann and Lunkenheimer (2012), and APiCS by Michaelis et al. (2013). The latter "has contributed considerably to the possibility to empirically test various assumptions about pidgins, creoles, and mixed languages" (Velupillai 2015: 3), and hence has made possible a new turn in the scientific study of contact languages.

There is thus an active community of established scholars researching and publishing on all aspects of contact linguistics. However, I am very happy to see that the fascination of contact linguistics apparently is not at all fading away but has been passed on to younger researchers, who are given a platform and the possibility for publication in this innovative journal.

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2   See: https://ekvv.uni-bielefeld.de/sinfo/publ/modul/27460867.

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