

## *Predicting the output of language contact: the view from microcontact*

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Can the output of language change in contact (CIC) be predicted, given some conditions? Connected to this is the question if the change that happens as a result of language contact is of the same nature as that which happens in diachrony, which is much more predictable than CIC. According to some scholars, change in contact is just “accelerated” diachronic change, and there is fundamentally no difference between the two, and therefore change in contact is somewhat predictable. In a recent overview, Kupisch & Polinsky (2021) provide an overview of parallels between change in contact and in diachrony, and ultimately claim that they are the same underlying mechanism.

In this talk, I will explore the extent to which a rather large sample of Romance languages in *microcontact* (i.e. contact among languages that are typologically identical and only present very limited grammatical variation) confirms this claim. After a general introduction to the methodology of microcontact linguistic investigation, some data generalizations will be considered. It will be shown that

- pronouns in (micro)contact confirm the claim that change in contact and diachronic change move along the same direction, and pronouns do not ever evolve in a direction different from that in which they have been shown to evolve independently.

- auxiliary selection in contact show that change moves along a “simplification” path, which is very similar to that described in grammaticalization studies. However, if the simplification is confirmed, the choice of the auxiliary is different: while Italo-Romance heritage in America tend to extend HAVE, the same varieties in Italy have witnessed the expansion of BE.

- Differential Object Marking in contact shows a tendency which is different from that of the diachronic development, in that DOM in contact tends to disappear (which is a sort of simplification). However, microcontact, as well as extreme “macro-contact” such as that which is found in creoles mirrors the diachronic development (i.e. emergence of DOM, complexification).

Based on these generalizations, I will argue that CIC is a heterogeneous phenomenon; both diachronic change and change in contact are very often driven by general cognitive principles (such as linking, or topicality) to which both 1<sup>st</sup> language learners and speakers of contact varieties resort to find some regularity in the messy language data. In substance, the questions about simplification or directionality of change are ill-posed; rather, if speakers have no clear perception of the locus of variation, they will adapt “third-factor”/cognitive strategies to resolve the conflict between the grammars in contact. If the locus of variation is salient and perceptible instead, change will follow a grammatical path to conflict resolution. Hence, there are some common strategies to the resolution of change in contact.

Regarding predictability, I will explore the idea that the output of change in contact is predictable in as far as it targets phi features on functional heads and their sequence. Whenever a monotonic functional sequence is interrupted, change might happen. This is not the case with phenomena involving information structure and interaction with external modules: in that case, change will be much less predictable.

