

Assessing new perspectives on language contact and the individual: terminological inflation or genuine progress?

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When analyzing the contributions on a plethora of subfields of contact linguistics in recent and forthcoming international handbooks on language contact (Darquennes, Salmons & Vandebussche 2019; Grant (forthcoming); Hickey (2013, new edition in preparation); Mufwene and Escobar (in preparation)), one is struck by the intense dynamic that defines present day ‘theoretical modellings of language contact and contact-induced language change’.

Compared to the state-of-the-art as it was known (and divulged) according to previous encyclopedic handbooks on the topic, it is fair to say that the field today is profoundly different as compared to only a few years ago on every relevant parameter, from new amounts and kinds of data, to new theories about language structure and social dimensions of language, to methods and topics of research.

In order to illustrate this, this presentation will focus on how the notion of the ‘multilingual repertoire’ now dominates the multidisciplinary assessment of language use in interaction. Ethnographic and anthropological perspectives on 21st century communication seem to have inspired a widespread, and well-received, urge for terminological innovation when describing and categorizing the individual’s variety choices in distinct settings.

This talk discusses this new mainstream discourse (including vogue terms like superdiversity, polylinguaging, translanguaging, or even plain languaging), tries to highlight the relevant differences between this and the previous terminological generation, and assesses the possible outcome of this terminological inflation (also cf. Pavlenko (2018), Grin (2018), and Meyerhoff (2019: 136–137)).

In the process, it will be shown how the appeal of the new in some cases tends to eclipse (or depreciate) terms from the traditional sociolinguistic canon, like ‘code-switching’ and ‘transfer’ – acknowledging, however, that this transparent classic terminology also saw continued refinement, appealing to new developments in the neighboring disciplines of sociology and psychology.

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Grin, François. 2018. On some fashionable terms in multilingualism research: Critical assessment and implications for language policy. In Peter A. Kraus & François Grin (eds.), *The politics of multilingualism: Europeanisation, globalisation and linguistic governance*, 247–274. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Hickey, Raymond (ed.). 2013. *The handbook of language contact*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell. [Second edition in preparation].

Meyerhoff, Miriam. 2019. *Introducing sociolinguistics*, 3rd edn. New York: Routledge.

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