A variationist approach to language contact

Shana Poplack with Nathalie Dion (*Department of Linguistics*, *University of Ottawa*)

No outcome of language contact has garnered more attention than code-switching, but controversy continues to reign over its identity, structure and the rules governing its use. We propose that much of the contention can be resolved by implementing the quantitative reasoning characteristic of the variationist paradigm. This workshop demonstrates how to adapt and apply the models and methods of linguistic variation theory to the empirical study of language mixing. We first review the components of evidence-based research on bilingual behavior, ranging from speaker sampling, data collection and corpus construction to data analysis and interpretation. The linguistic focus will be on the major manifestations of language contact – lexical borrowing and code-switching. The hands-on portion of the workshop will enable beginner and advanced researchers to gain practice in locating and identifying them in spontaneous bilingual discourse. Relying on the Comparative Variationist Method (Poplack & Tagliamonte 2001), analytical tools we will marshall include the Principle of Accountability, distinguishing sporadic occurrences from patterns, and crucial for language contact, identifying inter-linguistic *conflict sites*, establishing appropriate benchmarks for comparison, and exploiting rates and conditioning of variant selection.

Through combined lecture, discussion, and practice, participants should take away from this workshop an appreciation of the challenges inherent in the study of actual bilingual mixing and an enhanced understanding of the methodological and analytical tools required to tackle them.

Data will be supplied. Time permitting, we may also be able to review some materials brought by participants. A demonstration of the method applied to Tunisian Arabic-French bilingual data will be provided in our regular NWAV conference paper (see below).

Selected Readings

Poplack, Shana. 2015. Code-switching (Linguistic). In *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences, 2nd edition*. Elsevier Science Ltd.

Poplack, Shana & Dion, Nathalie. 2012. Myths and facts about loanword development. *Language Variation and Change* 24, 3. 279-315.

Poplack, Shana & Tagliamonte, Sali A. (2001). *African American English in the diaspora: Tense and aspect.* Malden: Blackwell Publishers. Chapter 5.

Poplack, Shana & Meechan, Marjory. 1998. How languages fit together in code-mixing. *International Journal of Bilingualism* 2, 2. 127-138.

Poplack, Shana. 1993. Variation theory and language contact. In *American dialect research: An anthology celebrating the 100th anniversary of the American Dialect Society*, ed. by Preston, D., 251-286. Amsterdam: Benjamins.

Torres Cacoullos, Rena & Catherine Travis. 2015. Gauging convergence on the ground: code-switching in the community. Special issue of *International Journal of Bilingualism.*

Demo

Poplack, Sayahi, Mourad & Dion. *An exception to the rule? Lone French nouns in Tunisian Arabic.* NWAV 43. Friday, 10:30, Lakeshore C.