

Social Factors in Spanish Language Contact Situations

Mike Olsen
LING 1253
December 12, 2008

Introduction

There has been a long standing debate on the different factors that play into language contact situations and which factors are most important in determining the outcome. Weinreich (1953) uses the term interference to refer to the phenomena that takes place when one language system is fundamentally changed as a result of foreign input. Besides linguistic typological reasons for language change in contact situations, he also mentions that the extra-linguistic factors (i.e., socio-cultural and psychological factors) are not to be dismissed. Thomason and Kaufman (1998) also mention that, ultimately, social factors are highly involved in language change in both genetically transmitted languages and mixed languages (see Thomason and Kaufman's definition of mixed language).

Like Thomason and Kaufman, Mufwene (2001) suggests that the social environment in which language change takes place is a significant factor in determining the eventual outcome. He uses the term ecology to refer to such social environments and states that both internal ecologies (i.e., L1 structure and direction of change before language contact) and external ecologies (i.e., L2 influences on structural change) affect the language contact outcomes.

Mufwene argues that both internal and external ecological factors can contribute to this language altering process. He uses pidgins, creoles, and koinés as examples of language evolution and shows that the ecology in which these languages formed plays an important part of the nature of the language (Mufwene, 2001).

Winford (2003) examines different types of language contact and explains that the different outcomes we see stem from different social situations. In other words, language contact phenomena can be categorized and better understood by

considering the situations under which they were formed. He names different contact outcomes such as language maintenance, language shift, and language creation and shows that different circumstances and differing levels of contact intensity produce slightly different linguistic results within these general outcomes. He also states that there is an obvious socio-environmental context in which all language contact happens and this context is important in shaping the linguistic outcome.

Although each author mentioned above has provided different approaches to explain language contact phenomena, it is evident that social context seems to be a connecting theme. Not unlike language contact in general, social factors are the main influences in language change involving Spanish language contact situations. This paper argues that social context is the main factor that differentiates the outcomes of language contact involving Spanish. A background of Quechua to Spanish language shift is provided. Basic typologies and sociohistoric events surrounding Papiamentu, a creole involving Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, Arawakan, and African languages, and Media Lengua, a bilingual mixed language involving Spanish and Quechua found in Ecuador are then presented. Finally, this paper discusses the social factors that appear to differentiate these three language contact outcomes.

Language Shift Resulting in Spanish

Although history has provided many opportunities for Spanish to contribute to language convergence leading to new language formation, surprisingly, it is not a language that is commonly found in new language outcomes (McWhorter, 2000). When Spanish has come into contact with another language, change is usually manifest in language shift rather than a mixed language or a creole language. This phenomenon (language shift towards Spanish) is evidenced by many Quechua-Spanish contact situations.

Languages

Quechua is an indigenous language spoken in various mutually intelligible dialects from Argentina to the southern part of Columbia. It is spoken mainly in and around the Andean highlands including small parts of the Amazonian lowlands. Quechua was dispersed by the Incas, who used the language for trade purposes. A form of Quechua has been in use in Peru, where the language probably originated, since around 500 A.D. (Muysken, 1997).

With the introduction of Spanish to areas where Quechua is spoken, Quechua speakers began to borrow words from Spanish. These borrowings, however, have not changed the basic grammatical structure of Quechua nor have they replaced core vocabulary, just as borrowings from Spanish to English have not changed the grammatical structure or core vocabulary of English. Therefore, although there are some Spanish lexemes commonly used in Quechua, it is by no means genealogically related to Spanish (O'Rourke, 2005).

Before Spanish speakers had contact with Quechua, it was not a written language. As Spanish missionaries settled in the areas where Quechua was spoken, they began to create Quechua dictionaries bases on Roman orthography. More recently, anthologies have been written in Quechua; however, the written language remains in place, for the most part, to record the oral tradition rather than as a form of contemporary communication (O'Rourke, 2005).

Spanish is a romance language that originated in Spain and spread throughout the world during the colonial period. Although there are many different dialects of Spanish, as with Quechua, they are all mutually intelligible. Spanish is spoken in Spain and most of the countries of Central and South America as well as Equatorial Guinea and many other countries where it is not an official language. Although Spanish has maintained its basic structures, the various dialects of Spanish have been influenced by the many other languages with which they have come into contact. This is evident with the Spanish-Quechua contact situation.

Lipski, as cited in Feke (2004), states that “the Spanish spoken by monolingual Spanish speakers living in Ecuador has converged toward Quechua” (pg. 24).

Shift

The nature of the social context surrounding the contact between Spanish and Quechua has often led to a language shift from Quechua to Spanish within certain speech communities. In some instances, the language shift has run its full course and Quechua has altogether disappeared. Although this is the case, Quechua has not become an endangered language, partly because of the large area and different communities where it is used. There are still many monolingual Quechua communities that are thriving to this day.

Highly stigmatizing attitudes towards Quechua have created a language shift in speech communities where Spanish and Quechua have come in contact. Such stigmatization has been demonstrated by Sánchez (2003). He shows that in San Juan de Miraflores, a district of Lima, Peru, children had negative attitudes toward Quechua. Teachers also had a negative attitude towards Quechua, evidenced by the fact that they did not allow children to speak Quechua in the classroom and had no desire to use it in an academic environment.

King (2000) also shows a negative attitude aimed toward Quechua speakers. He studied Quichua, a dialect of Quechua found in Ecuador, from a revitalization standpoint in Lagunas, Ecuador. King posits that one of the reasons for the shift from Quichua to Spanish is that Quichua speakers were put down for speaking their native language. He states that:

Many members of Lagunas’ older generation recall being made fun of for speaking Quichua. Town whites reportedly ridiculed Quichua speakers as those who ‘no saben hablar’ (‘do not know how to speak’), or only knew how to speak ‘animal languages’ (pg. 73).

This discrimination led the Lagunas people to begin to have a negative attitude towards their native language. Eventually even indigenous people would laugh at someone when a Quichua word was used.

Another contributing source to language shift in Lagunas that King describes is that at some point students were punished physically and verbally for speaking Quichua. The extent to which punishment was meted is unknown, what is important is that parents and students associated speaking Quichua with castigation.

As shown in these examples, language shift has taken place under much social pressure from the dominating language. This, perhaps, is one of the reasons that when Spanish is in intense contact with another language, the outcome is an assimilation of the indigenous language by Spanish.

Other Language Outcomes Involving Spanish

That Spanish usually shifts and does not often mix or creolize, does not diminish the fact that Spanish creoles and mixed languages *do* exist. The following discussion shows examples of a creole and a mixed language involving Spanish. Basic typologies will be provided along with sociohistoric information that has shaped the formation of these languages.

Creolization

Although Spanish has factored into a few other creoles, Papiamentu seems to be the creole that is most often associated with Spanish. Papiamentu is spoken on the islands of Aruba, Curaçao, and Bonaire which are located off the coast of Venezuela. Today Papiamentu exists as a prestige language; being used across different social classes and ethnic groups, in various domains, and in the media (Holm, 2000).

Everyone living on these islands speaks Papiamentu; however, there still remains a separation between the other languages each ethnic group speaks. In referring to this division, John Holm (2000) states that “protestant whites attend services in Dutch, Jews tend to prefer Spanish, while the black and mixed population belong largely to the Catholic church, which uses Papiamentu” (pg. 78).

Papiamentu has an interesting history that has contributed to the current state of the language. Originally these islands were inhabited by Amerindian Arawakan speakers. By Pountain’s (2000) account, the Spaniards discovered the islands in 1499 and approximately twenty-five Spanish speakers settled Curaçao in 1527 (Holm, 2000). This first language contact was interrupted about 100 years later when the Dutch took over the islands in 1634 and used the island as a center for slave trade. Although it is unclear exactly when, Portuguese speaking Jews from Brazil entered the picture and it is likely that they knew pidgin Portuguese that they used with slaves in Brazil. It is also very likely that the people who ran the slave trade spoke Portuguese because they had previously worked in Brazil. All of this leads to a strong Portuguese influence on the forming creole and not a Spanish influence. According to McWhorter (2000), a Portuguese-based creole formed first and laid the ground for a relexification towards a Spanish-based creole.

Spanish became the main influence on the language only later when Spanish-speaking emigrants from Holland moved onto the islands and became the majority. Because Spanish and Portuguese are so typologically similar, the relexification process was relatively unproblematic. This process of the relexification of a Portuguese-base creole by Spanish supports the idea that when Spanish has come into contact with other languages, it has not been involved in creolization, rather it has contributed to a relexification of an already formed creole. This does not have to point only toward typological reasons for the lack of a true Spanish creole. That Spanish-speakers were not in the same types of social

contexts as other superstrate languages could also explain the lack of true Spanish creoles.

The hypothesis of a relexified Portuguese creole, however, is not completely sound. If the creole was already solidified, the relexification process would not only involve Portuguese words as are seen in Papiamentu. The argument that Spanish is involved in creole formation, therefore, can still be held up. Because of the social situations that existed in the islands where Papiamentu was forming, Spanish was able to be added into the still forming creole. Therefore, the fact that social context is the main factor in language formation is upheld.

Language Mixing

Aside from the involvement that Spanish has had in creole languages, it has also played a major part in at least one mixed language—Media Lengua. A definition of mixed languages is first important to understanding Media Lengua. Bakker and Mous (1994) roughly define mixed languages as languages that have lexicons from one source language and grammar from another source language. An important part of this definition is that the majority of the each system must come from one source language. Around 90% of the lexicon of mixed languages, including the core vocabulary, must come from and be traceable to a language other than the language that provides the grammar. Usually, the source languages are genetically far apart and speakers generally speak the mixed language and one or both of the source languages.

Media Lengua falls under this category because it shares 90% of its lexicon with Spanish and takes its grammar from Quechua. Muysken (1997) describes Media Lengua as “essentially Quechua (Q) with the vast majority of its stems replaced by Spanish (Sp) forms” (pg. 365). It has adopted Quechua phonology and

the Spanish verbs have been regularized. Forms of Media Lengua are spoken in central and southern Ecuador (Musken, 1996).

The interesting aspect of Media Lengua, and what differentiates it from Papiamentu, is the sociohistoric context that helped shape it. Media Lengua was formed by a group of people that Muysken (1997) calls the *obreros* (laborers). The *obreros* is a group of young men who, beginning in the twentieth century, spent a prolonged amount of time working in the Spanish-speaking community of Quito. These men returned to their homes, having learned Spanish yet still being able to speak Quechua. Codeswitching between Spanish and Quechua was prevalent among the *obreros* which, over time, led to a more stable language (Thomason, 2003). Another social aspect of Media Lengua is that it has always been used to communicate with members of the same group, not to communicate between languages (Muysen, 1981). This fact plays an important part in determining why Media Lengua formed the way it did.

The young men that worked in Quito and returned to their Quechua speaking communities faced a social dilemma. Through their work, they had encountered urban Hispanic society and became “more affluent and independent than their peasant relatives” (Muysken, 1996, pg. 1336). Because of this differentiation, they no longer identified with the rest of the Quechua speaking community though they lived within the community. They also didn’t fully identify with the Hispanic community that they had worked in either. Therefore, the *obreros* deliberately used this new form of mixed Spanish and Quechua to express themselves and their new found identity which was then learned by their children.

It appears, then, that a conscious, deliberate effort was made to form Media Lengua. The need to show a new found identity and a deliberate decision to use a new type of language is, as Thomason (2003) puts it, “the only mechanism for which a strong case can be made as a universal contributor to the genesis of bilingual mixed languages” (pg. 40).

Effect of Social Factors on Formation

As evidenced from these three examples of Spanish language contact outcomes, the salient factor that determines ultimate (synchronic) typology is social context. In the following section, social factors that contribute to different outcomes evident in Spanish language contact are discussed.

Three different linguistic outcomes forged through language contact are presented herein. These outcomes correlate with three different social contexts. This correlation is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Social contexts and Linguistic outcomes

Social context	Linguistic outcome
Substrate language is highly stigmatized by superstrate speakers	Language shift
Various superstrate languages over time used for purely communicative purposes	Creole
Bilinguals deliberately choosing to use superstrate lexicon to demonstrate a new identity	Mixed language

It is clear from the Quechua to Spanish examples that one of the main social factors contributing to language shift in the Spanish language contact situations is a strong stigmatization of the indigenous language. Such great social pressure to have a negative attitude towards the indigenous language and learn the prestige language led to a rapid language shift. Sánchez (2003) states that only one generation passed before the language shift was complete. Although the language shifted in one generation, other social factors helped maintain the desire for a Spanish speaking community (e.g., work and education).

Because this stigmatizing pressure didn't exist in the Papiamentu situation, a new language used for commerce and trade had more time to develop. Superstrate speakers also had communication as a main goal, leaving room for other language use. Also, as discussed above, the relexification of Portuguese to Spanish is important in the involvement of Spanish in creole languages. Muysken (1981), citing Diebold, points out that the sociological settings concerning Spanish did not favor the creation of pidgins, and thus creoles, because "no sudden need for communication between speakers of different languages... is present" (pg. 52).

The creation of Media Lengua is completely different because it involves conscious decision-making rather than any kind of social pressure being imposed on the speech community. Although sociolinguistic identity can be seen in language shift and creolization, it is only the catalyst for language change in mixed language formation.

Conclusion

Viewing the different linguistic outcomes of Spanish language contact and social contexts surrounding those outcomes has helped clarify the main factors that help determine outcome type. Although linguistic typology should not be forgotten, social factors seem to hold the most weight in deciding end results of Spanish language contact. The fact that language contact situations involving Spanish usually end in language shift is interesting. It raises questions that may be answered by examining typological constraints of Spanish and sociocultural values of Spanish speakers. More research in this area could provide more meaningful insight to this observation.

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