Languages in Contact: The high stakes of grammatical border-crossing

Time: TR 2-3:30p  
Location: KCB 104

Professor: Daniel Erker  
Email: danerker@bu.edu

Office: 718 Commonwealth Ave  
Office hours: M 11:30a-1p  
Room 501a  
R 3:30-5p, and by apt.

Course website: The course is hosted on Blackboard Learn  
Instructor website: http://blogs.bu.edu/danerker/

Course description and goals:
Where does one language end and another begin? Can we neatly box in one linguistic system and seal it off from another? While we often associate particular languages with specific countries or regions of the world, the truth is that linguistic and national frontiers very rarely overlap in either time or space. Indeed, languages do not require passports, and they routinely travel, mix, and interact with each other across permeable borders on both micro- and macroscopic scales. The goal of this course is to examine the mechanisms and outcomes of such language contact by surveying cases around the globe from the past and present. We will focus our attention on common, relatively superficial processes of language contact such as lexical-borrowing and code-switching as well as remarkable contact events such as wholesale language death and the emergence of entirely new linguistic systems. We will investigate whether certain levels of linguistic structure, such as sounds, words, or sentences, are more susceptible to contact-induced language change than others. We will examine the relationship between individuals and groups in situations of language contact and explore the idea that a single person might be able to accelerate or stall rates of linguistic change. We will consider language contact within bi- and multilingual minds. Finally, we will determine the extent to which the outcomes of language contact are universal and inevitable, and, conversely, the ways in which each contact situation must be understood uniquely as the complex result of interacting social, political, linguistic, and historical factors.

Prerequisites for the course:  
CAS LX 250 Introduction to Linguistics

Students completing this course will learn:

• To understand basic concepts in contact linguistics
• To assess patterns of contact-induced linguistic variation and change
• To identify, describe, and explain mechanisms of language contact
• To demonstrate a knowledge of language contact situations around the world
• To critique current theoretical and methodical trends in the study of pidgins and creoles
Required Readings – (Available at Barnes and Noble in Kenmore Square):


Course requirements and grading:

- Weekly quizzes (20%)
- Semester research project (10%)
- Midterm examination (30%)
- Final examination (30%)
- Classroom participation (10%)

Weekly quizzes will be administered during Thursday lecture (with the exception of week 14, during which our quiz will be on Tuesday). Quizzes will cover reading and lecture material from the previous week. These quizzes, which will take roughly 15 minutes to complete, encourage you to complete the weekly readings, review lecture notes and keep on top of the course material. There will be 11 quizzes in total, the first of which will be practice and will not count towards your course grade. The lowest quiz grade of the remaining 10 will be dropped, making the quiz grade the result of your 9 best quizzes.

Semester project. Each student will examine a language contact event currently underway in the city of Boston. The project will be discussed in detail in week three. A project proposal will be due October 16. Final versions of your project will be due December 9.

Course policies:

Late assignments are not accepted.

Missing the midterm or final examination without receiving explicit verbal permission from me beforehand automatically drops your grade 10%, and makeups will be given only at my discretion and convenience, provided that there is a good and compelling reason for your absence. Leaving a message on my voice mail or sending me e-mail does not constitute receiving verbal permission unless I have responded to you.

Procedures. Class time will be devoted to presenting information that the textbook reinforces and also offers another viewpoint. Many topics will be covered in greater detail in class than in your textbook. It is your responsibility to (1) read material from the text(s) before coming to class, (2) to attend class promptly and regularly, (3) to obtain any class notes for sessions you miss, and (4) print class notes (if desired) which will be posted on Blackboard by 8 pm the night before class. I encourage you to talk to me outside of class if you are having particular difficulties and/or have comments about the course.

Other matters. No cell phones, no “extra credit”, no computers unless looking at class notes.

Attendance. I will take attendance every time we meet. More than two unexcused absences will result in a failing ‘Classroom Participation’ grade. Please feel free to speak with me regarding any
and all absences. It is not my intent to punish students for getting sick or having genuine and compelling reasons for missing a class.

**Academic Integrity.** All students are responsible for understanding and complying with the BU Academic Conduct Code, available at http://www.bu.edu/academics/resources/academic-conduct-code/

**Grading policies:**
We will review the quizzes together immediately after taking them, and I will return graded quizzes the following week. I am committed to grading exams promptly.

**Grading standards:**

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<tr>
<th>Grading standards</th>
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<tbody>
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## Course roadmap (subject to adjustment)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week Dates</th>
<th>Quiz</th>
<th>MAIN TOPICS</th>
<th>Reading for week</th>
<th>Sub-topics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 9-2 9-4</td>
<td>Q*</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>W Chapter 1 B C1-2</td>
<td>What is the ‘natural state’ of language? Biolinguistic diversity &amp; language endangerment Types of contact situations *Practice quiz</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 9-16 9-18</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>STRUCTURAL DIFFUSION</td>
<td>WC3(1st half) BC4</td>
<td>Direct borrowing of structural features The social contexts of structural convergence Case study: Spanish in Los Angeles Distribute Semester Project Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 9-23 9-25</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>STRUCTURAL DIFFUSION</td>
<td>WC3(2nd half) BC5</td>
<td>Constraints on syntactic diffusion Case study: Sprachbünde in the Balkans – contact across contiguous speech communities</td>
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<td>6 10-7 10-9</td>
<td>Q</td>
<td>CODE-SWITCHING: LINGUISTIC ASPECTS</td>
<td>WC5 BC7 Prepare for Midterm exam</td>
<td>Structural constraints on code-switching A production based model of code-switching Case study: constraints on English code-switching in Swahili,</td>
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<td>10-14</td>
<td>No Classes BU Monday</td>
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<td>7 10-16</td>
<td>In Class Midterm Research project proposal due</td>
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| 8 | 10-21, 10-23 | BILINGUAL MIXED LANGUAGES  
Definition and classification  
Case studies: Media lengua of Sarguro, Copper Island  
Aleut, and Michif in Manitoba | WC6(1st h) BC8 |
| 9 | 10-28, 10-30 | GROUP 2ND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION & SHIFT  
L1 influence on SLA  
Simplification in SLA  
Case studies: English in Ireland | WC6(2nd h) BC9 |
| 10 | 11-4, 11-6 | GROUP 2ND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION & SHIFT  
L1 Attrition and Death  
Case studies: Spanish in the Americas – Taíno, Arawak,  
Guaarani, Quecha, Maya, and Nahuatl | WC7 BC10 |
| 11 | 11-11, 11-13 | PIDGINS & PIDGINIZATION  
Social contexts of pidgin formation  
Case study: Hawaiian Pidgin English | WC8(1st h) BC11 |
| 12 | 11-18, 11-20 | PIDGINS & PIDGINIZATION  
Structural characteristics of pidgins  
Case studies: Tok Pisin, Russenorski | WC8(2nd h) BC12 |
| 13 | 11-25 | CREOLES & CREOLIZATION  
Defining creoles  
Sociohistorical background to creole formation  
Case studies: European imperialism and the proliferation of  
Afro-Caribbean creoles – Papiamentu, Palenquero, and Haitian | WC9 (1st h) BC13 |
| 11-27 | No Class Thanksgiving Break |
| 14 | 12-2 | CREOLES & CREOLIZATION  
Aspects of creole grammar  
The emergence of radical creoles  
Case studies: Suriname | WC9 (2nd h) BC14 |
| 15 | 12-9 | CREOLES & CREOLIZATION  
Mechanisms, constraints, and principles in creole formation  
De-creolization  
Case studies: Afro-Bolivian Spanish  
SEMESTER PROJECT DUE  
LAST DAY OF CLASSES | Prepare for Final exam |

**FINAL EXAM: Tuesday, 12-16 3-5p**