Marriage patterns and language contact: Initial results from a worldwide comparison

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Marriage is an opportunity for linguistic exchange via spouse exchange. Preferred marriage patterns iterated over generations can integrate or separate geographically contiguous, but linguistically distinct, communities (Lansing et al. 2017; Dobrushina et al. 2019; Trudgill 2011; Pakendorf et al. 2021:843-5). The likelihood of language contact through marriage patterns is naturally higher when marriage occurs across communities of differing languages and lects. Case studies have found that marriages across linguistic borders indeed affect outcomes of language contact (e.g., Epps 2018; Stanford and Pan 2013), but there are no comparative studies identifying general trends on a worldwide basis.

Our study presents preliminary results investigating whether there is any relationship between marriage patterns and outcomes of language contact from a crosslinguistic perspective. The dataset comprises sociolinguistic and linguistic data from 24 language contact scenarios each featuring one pair of genealogically unrelated languages, a Focus language, and a Neighbor language (the contact sets are listed on page 2). These have been sampled using the AUTOTYP areas (Nichols et al. 2013) as one of the criteria of language selection and are part of a larger 150-language dataset (Di Garbo et al. 2021).

The sociolinguistic data were collected via a questionnaire designed specifically to investigate social contact. The questionnaire was filled out by collaborating experts of each contact scenario and covers numerous sociolinguistic factors spanning six social domains. This paper investigates marriage patterns (exogamic and endogamic), and language use in marriage (monolingual or bilingual modes) in the domains of Social Exchange & Marriage, and Family & Kin.

The linguistic data concern nominal number, one of the most frequent morphosyntactic categories worldwide, and also known to be prone to contact effects (Corbett 2000; Igartua 2015). For each of the sampled languages, we collect data about type of number distinctions (e.g., singular vs. plural), the obligatoriness of number marking, and the occurrence and formal appearance of number marking on nouns and through agreement. In addition to gathering information about the nominal number systems of the two languages of each contact pair, we also collect data about a third language genealogically related to the Focus language, but spoken outside the contact pair zone. We call this the Benchmark language. By comparing features of the Focus language with the Benchmark, we aim to disentangle contact influence from the Neighbor language from inheritance.

During the talk, we will present initial results about how the interim linguistic data fare against the marriage patterns documented for each contact set.

The contact scenarios under study

Contact pairs are as follows. Language sets are listed by macro-area and alphabetically, based on the Focus Language name; ISO codes and language family name are given in parenthesis: Africa: Baïnounk Gubëeher (gube1234; Atlantic-Congo) & Mandinka (mnk; Mande), Bade (bde; Afro- Asiatic) & Manga Kanuri (kby; Saharan), Kambaata (ktb; Afro-Asiatic) & Wolaytta (wal; Tane- Omotic), Korandje (dsq; Songhay) & Maghrebi Arabic (tez; Afro-Asiatic), Langi (a.k.a Rangi; lag; Atlantic-Congo) & Alagwa (wbj; Afro-Asiatic), Ndebele (nde, Atlantic-Congo) & Tjwao (tjwa1234; Khoe-Kwadi) + 1 anonymised set. Australia: Mawng (mph; Iwaidjan) & Kunbarlang (wlg; Gunwinyguan). Eurasia Burmese (mya; Sino-Tibetan) & Mon (mnw; Austroasiatic), Maltese (mlt; Afro-Asiatic) & Sicilian (scn; Indo-European), Muak Sa-aak (tlq; Austroasiatic) & Lü (a.k.a Tai Lue; khb; Tai-Kadai), Santali (sat; Austroasiatic) & Bengali (ben; Indo-European), Zazaki (a.k.a Zaza; zza; Indo-European) & Turkish (tur; Turkic). North America: Nuxalk (blc; Salishan) & Kwak'wala (kwk; Wakashan), Toluca (a.k.a Temoaya Otomi; ott; Otomanguean) & (Mexican) Spanish (spa; Indo-European). South America: Chipaya (cap; Uro-Chipaya) & Central Aymara (a.k.a Bolivian Aymara; ayr, Aymaran), Toba (tob; Guaricuruan) & Spanish (spa; Indo-European), Western Toba (tob; Guaricuruan) & Wichí (wich1261; mata1289, Matacoan), Yuhup (yab; Naduhup) & Macuna (myy; Tucanoan). Papuanesia: Alorese (aol; Austronesian) & Adang (adn; Timor-Alor- Pantar), Coastal Marind (mrz; Anim) & Marori (mok; Marori), Ipili (ipi; Nuclear Trans New Guinea) & Hewa (ham; Sepik), Kwoma (kmo; Sepik) & Manambu (mle; Ndu), Papapana (ppn; Austronesian) & Rotokas (roo; North-Bougainville).

Keywords: Language contact, Typology, Sociolinguistics, Number marking, Marriage patterns

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