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Two Types of Functional Transfer in Language Contact

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to examine one kind of cross linguistic influence, or transfer, in language contact situations. This article discusses “transfer”, defined as applying the grammatical functions of a morpheme from one language to a morpheme in another language that does not normally have these functions. With regard to language contact, most reported instances of this kind of transfer

a new grammatical morpheme in an expanded pidgin or creole, resulting from the use of a lexical morpheme in the recipient language, RL) with semantic and syntactic properties of a grammatical morpheme of the substrate language(s), SL). Another kind of functional transfer, however, results in an already existing grammatical morpheme in the SL that speakers possess with semantic properties, but not syntactic properties, of a grammatical morpheme in the SL that speakers possess. Two types of functional transfer differ in that the first entails morphological augmentation while the second involves the transfer of an existing morpheme. Other differences between the two types of transfer are that certain constraints apply to the first but not to the second. In addition, the first type of transfer, as opposed to the second, does not commonly occur in the early stages of language acquisition. Explanations proposed for these distinctions concern different strategies used for morphological development of a contact language. Different contact languages can be placed along a continuum based on the extent of functional transfer.

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