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Review of Syntactic Transfer, Contact-Induced Change, and the Evolution of Bilingual Mixed Codes: Focus on Karelian-Russian Language Alternation, by Anneli Sarhima

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ANNELI SARHIMAA, *Syntactic transfer, contact-induced change, and the evolution of bilingual mixed codes: Focus on Karelian-Russian language alternation*. Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 1999. Pp. 340.

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The data that underlie Anneli Sarhima's excellent study were gathered between 1989 and 1992, under restrictive field circumstances. Visits to Karelia required what the author terms "intricate co-operation with academic and public authorities in Russia" (p. 76), and the duration of any stay was limited to a few weeks. From her home base in Finland, she made short visits to three Central Karelian villages in the summers of 1989 and 1991, working with additional Central Karelian speakers resident in the capital city of Karelia in the winters of 1990 and 1991; in 1992, a two-week trip allowed her to work in nine Tver Karelian villages in central Russia. That these compressed visits produced 30-some hours of taped interviews and 31 sets of translation-task data (15 Central Karelian, 16 Tver Karelian) does credit to her careful advance planning; the frankness with which she points to limitations in the resulting data does equal credit to her scholarly scrupulousness.

The great interest of Karelian for the study of syntactic transfer and mixed codes lies in the millennium-long contact between this East Finnic language and the North West Russian dialects of the same region. Conditions for mutual linguistic influence were enhanced not only by the contact's long duration but also by the fact that it was between a nonstandardized Finnic language and a dialectal form of Russian – i.e., between two genetically unrelated speech forms largely unconstrained by the norming of written communication and formal transmission. Sarhima points out that most studies of code-switching, code alternation, and their effects have involved at least one standard language (and often two), whereas long-continuing language contact occurs most often in peripheral border regions, between nonstandard dialects; constraints imposed by awareness of standard language norms tend to be weakest in such regions, yet discussion of contact phenomena is often couched in terms of standard-language features. For example, constructions incorporating loanwords, commonplace in such borderland contact, are too easily taken as indications of syntactic interference. (She instances a "Russified" Experiencer State Construction reported for one variety of Karelian because of the presence of a Russian-origin predicate nominal; yet the structure in question has an exact structural counterpart in Finnish, closely related to Karelian and very little influenced by Russian.)

Sarhima herself seems to have made no prior assumptions about direction or degree of influence and to have relied on careful data analysis. Since she was interested in the effects of spontaneous language alternation, she deliberately

spoke in both Russian and Karelian at initial meetings with potential interviewees, making them aware that use of either language was possible. She conducted the first half of a subsequent hour-long interview in Karelian, and the second half in Russian. She herself was entirely consistent about language choice in each half of the interview, but she did not attempt to impose her choice on her interlocutors; allowing them free choice of language seemed most likely to produce speech data resembling their ordinary speech behavior, since all Karelian speakers today are bilingual in Russian, and bilingual Karelian conversation partners are thus the norm.

Sarhima's book looks at one particular construction that turned up in the Central Karelian interviews gathered in 1989: a necessitative construction not native to Finnic languages but modeled on Russian, the Duty and Obligation Construction (DOC). Just 16 instances of the DOC appeared among 505 instances of necessitative constructions used by the Central Karelian interviewees, but in such highly inflected languages as Karelian and Russian, the construction was nearly ideal for an examination of linguistic processes in language contact. Its semantic and structural environments could be compared with those of the many Finnic necessitative constructions in the interviews; the degree to which the Russian loanword appearing as predicate was adapted phonologically and morphologically to Karelian could be evaluated; and the extent to which other Russian elements accompanied use of the loanword in question and the degree to which the Russian predicate did or did not affect case marking on other elements of the sentence (the Target and the Experiencer, in particular) could be examined. All this was done with an eye to shedding light on certain major issues in language-contact study: distinguishing code-switches from borrowings, distinguishing one code from another, illuminating syntactic transfer in bilingual language alternation, and evaluating the role of constant language alternation in the evolution of mixed languages.

The translation tests administered in subsequent research trips were modeled after the structures that produced the DOC instances in the Central Karelian interviews. Sarhima continued to interview speakers as well, so as to have a more general speech profile for as many translation-test sources as possible. She routinely recorded age, sex, educational history, degree of geographical mobility, and so forth, in order to build up a general sociolinguistic profile of each speaker. There proved to be no clearcut sociolinguistic or geographical features that correlated with use of the Russian-modeled DOC construction. Much more crucially for Sarhima's purposes, it proved to be impossible to state with certainty which elements in DOC-containing clauses or sentences were Russian, and which were Karelian. The Karelian and Russian phonological systems have in many respects converged over the centuries of contact, so that code assignments are imperfectly determinable on the basis of segmental phonology. First-syllable stress has spread from Karelian into North West Russian, while some long-established Russian loanwords with non-initial stress are indigenized in Karelian, so that stress place-

ment is also not an adequate guide to code assignment. Discourse particles, conjunctions, and adverbs are now frequently shared by Karelian and North West Russian. The morphology and syntax of these two languages, long in contact, frequently match each other closely enough that morphological or syntactic integration of Russian material into Karelian is not assessable. Rather, Karelian-origin and Russian-origin lexical and grammatical items have amalgamated to such an extent that the resulting syntactic constructions can be impossible to derive from one source or the other. Here are just two examples of the sort of subtle cases Sarhima encountered. First, there was an instance of the DOC in which a clearcut Russian system morpheme appeared on the loanword predicate (a plural suffix), yet the syntax of the clause was just as clearly Karelian, since the Experiencer was dropped, which would not be permissible in Russian. In the second example, there were instances of blending of the morphophonological rules of the two languages, with first-syllable stress indicating that speakers had assimilated the loanword predicate to Karelian, while the vowel of the final syllable was simultaneously lengthened in recognition of the final-syllable stress of the Russian original.

Sarhima finds the usual treatment of code-switching as an alternation between two distinct codes excessively simplistic, and in fact inapplicable to the Karelian–Russian context. The complexities of Karelian–Russian contact phenomena require her to recognize “multilayered code-switching” (Meeuwis & Blommaert 1998) with finely graded distinctions between codes. Ultimately she recognizes the following codes, with three to five of them typically used by any single individual: Traditional Karelian; Neo-Karelian (showing extra-sentential switches into Russian); Russian–Karelian (involving constant unconstrained alternation between Karelian and Russian grammatical devices, in effect a “mixed code”); Karussian (with amalgamation of Karelian and Russian grammars); Finnish–Karelian (a Karelian leveled somewhat toward Finnish); and Russian. She notes that most Karelians have full command of more than one variety of Russian, for that matter, so that in a study focusing on Russian rather than Karelian, it would be necessary to recognize distinct codes of Russian as well.

Sarhima encounters difficulties in applying both Peter Auer’s (1998) pragmatic codeswitching continuum model and Carol Myers-Scotton’s (1993) matrix language frame model in the Karelian–Russian setting. She suggests that, in dealing with a speech community without any monolinguals, it may not be appropriate to “see every switch as something that has to be accounted for in terms of alternation between two distinct languages” (245). She rejects attrition and semi-lingualism (confusing semi-speaker with semi-lingual, unfortunately, on p. 199) as explanations for her complex data, and she considers that having several parallel codes in the linguistic repertoire is more likely to represent linguistic richness than poverty, especially since the “Mixed Karelian” code, Russian–Karelian, is just one of several codes drawn on by its users. As for the prevalence of variable forms, they are to be expected in “truly bilingual mixed codes like Russian-

REVIEWS

Karelian” because each speaker has more options to choose from (231). Late in her study, Sarhimaa reflects on the numerous gray areas encountered in her analyses of bilingual Karelian codes and suggests importantly that, given the length and intensity of the contact, the sorts of language blending processes to be observed in present-day Karelian were probably characteristic of Karelian and the North West Russian dialects in the past, too. That is, local language states cannot confidently be assumed to have been fewer or simpler a century or two ago than they are today.

By noting provisional analyses and then detailing the further data analyses that persuaded her to move on to subsequent positions, Sarhimaa’s exposition allows readers the stimulation of accompanying her through increasingly sophisticated stages of interpretation. She shows meticulous respect for her data, and in this as in many other respects, her work deserves to be emulated.

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SHANNA POPLACK (ed.), *The English history of African American English*. (Language in Society, 28.) Oxford: Blackwell, 2000. Pp. v + 277. Pb \$31.95.

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Poplack and other contributors to this important volume are to be commended for an exceptionally well crafted book, with a succession of groundbreaking studies of African American English (AAE). Although this work will undoubtedly add fuel to the flames of historical linguistic controversy that continue to swirl around African Americans, Poplack and her colleagues go far to advance hypotheses and analyses that argue in favor of the English origins of African American Vernacular English (AAVE).

The English history of African American English (EHAAE) consists of five sections, including an informative introduction by Poplack, and seven additional chapters that evaluate “Morphophonological variables,” (Part 1), “Morphosyntactic variables,” (Part 2), “Syntactic variables,” (Part 3), and “Sociohistorical context” (Part 4). The text will be of great benefit to any scholar who is interested in the history and structure of AAE, and the standard of research for this entire volume is consistently high.