

Contact-induced change in the usage-based era

Ad Backus

Tilburg University

a.m.backus@tilburguniversity.edu

As part of a growing research tradition in contact linguistics, I have been involved in several projects that apply a usage-based approach to the investigation and explanation of language contact phenomena. In this talk, I will first summarize some of that recent work, before relating it to other traditions and trends in the study of bilingualism. I will defend the position that much of this work either uses a usage-based perspective or is compatible with it. Finally, interpreting this as suggesting there is a need for the integration of disciplinary perspectives, I will sketch what such integration could look like, and to what degree this necessitates new research questions and a fresh look at some old ones. Work on language contact has taken place in various sub-disciplines and often focuses on separate phenomena that nevertheless all occur together in the everyday lived reality and in the minds of bilingual speakers. These phenomena include language mixing (or codeswitching), contact-induced structural change, the processing of bilingual speech and its implications for the cognitive organization of bilingual knowledge, and the social factors that determine language use in multilingual settings, especially language choice, and what this tells us about identity issues as well as long-term developments such as language maintenance and language shift. I will illustrate these various strands, where possible, with work on Turkish spoken as an immigrant language in the Netherlands and other parts of Western Europe. I will then argue that adopting a usage-based perspective entails the conclusion that these phenomena are not as separable as it seems, and that better, or more encompassing, explanations of linguistic knowledge and of language change could be forthcoming if we manage to integrate these research traditions more. The key, I will argue, is the closer integration of sociality and cognition as dimensions that both need to be taken into account jointly. While both cognitive sciences and social sciences, and their linguistic manifestations psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics, have, of course, valuable things to say about language, the direct association between the way language is used, as determined by the needs of human sociality, and the way it is processed, as determined by the universals of human cognition, makes it necessary to address their interaction as well. In this talk I will explore this integration to account for empirical findings on Immigrant Turkish and compare the perspective to various recently popularized concepts, including Heritage Languages, simultaneous and sequential acquisition, and translanguaging. What I hope to contribute to is the contours of a model that explains why languages change, a model that uses cognitive underpinnings and the requirements of sociality as jointly contributing causal factors, and that conjures up new questions about language that help linguistics reposition itself in the broader field of human culture studies.