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The unbearable lightness of being bilingual: English–Afrikaans language contact in South Africa

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Abstract

This paper discusses McCormick's sociolinguistic study *Language in Cape Town's District Six* [McCormick, K., 2003. *Language in Cape Town's District Six*. Oxford University Press, Oxford] and locates it within the fields of South African sociolinguistics and language contact studies. McCormick's work raises pertinent questions about sociolinguistic historiography, fieldwork methodology, bilingualism, (socio-)linguistic meaning, and the permeability of linguistic boundaries in language contact. McCormick approaches bilingual speech first and foremost from a code-switching perspective, broadly combining Myers-Scotton's markedness model with conversation-analysis approaches (Gumperz/Auer). However, there is also evidence in the data that conversational language use in this bilingual working-class community can be interpreted within the framework of mixed languages and bilingual convergence. This raises important questions about norm formation and stabilization in language contact situations, and about the diachronic trajectories of bilingual speech.

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Entangled in words, as a bird in lime-twigs.

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651)

1. Introduction: ‘a region of enormous complexity’

The study of language contact is a dynamic field which — since Weinreich’s seminal work *Languages in Contact* (1953) — has moved from the margins to the centre of linguistic research, and has contributed significantly to our understanding of language formation and language change. Languages in contact are shaped not only by the dynamics of internal, evolutive language change, but also by processes of linguistic convergence and language mixing which continuously interrupt the stabilization of fixed form-meaning pairings, and challenge structuralist conceptions of language as a closed, unitary and finite rule-system. Contact languages are fluid linguistic systems with ‘soft’ rather than ‘hard’ edges (cf. LePage, 1988; Gardner-Chloros, 1995; Franceschini, 1998), and the classification of the various forms and outcomes of bilingual speech is notoriously difficult. As noted by Thomason (2001, p. 59): “Trying to sort out the linguistic results of language contact plunges us immediately into a region of enormous complexity.” (My emphasis)

The conceptual and empirical complexities of language contact are at the heart of Kay McCormick’s (2003) linguistic and anthropological study *Language in Cape Town’s District Six* which describes language use in an ethnically-mixed, bilingual working-class community in inner-city Cape Town. District Six gained international prominence during the forced removals of the 1960s when most of it was declared a so-called white area under the infamous Group Areas Act (1950) which declared whole neighbourhoods as reserved for white residents only. However, a small section of the original neighbourhood was not affected by the act, and its residents — who had been classified ‘coloured’ under the Population Registration Act (1950) — were able to stay in their homes. This was the Chapel Street area (comprising 220 houses), where McCormick conducted her research in the 1980s and late 1990s. Bilingual speech (English and Afrikaans) has been a characteristic feature of the larger District Six neighbourhood since the nineteenth century.

The slim volume (the main text is just under 200 pages) is a welcome and thought-provoking addition to South African sociolinguistics in its careful attention to the (socio)historical context of language use, in its ethnographic approach and because of the fundamental theoretical questions it raises about the historical trajectories of bilingual speech. The broad theoretical framework of the book comes from code-switching (henceforth CS) research. However, the perspective adopted transcends the traditional view that CS can be reduced to examples of language use where binary choice of linguistic form functions as a well-defined index of social meaning and identity. McCormick follows the critique voiced e.g. by Gardner-Chloros (1995), who has argued that code-switching often merges into other interlingual phenomena and that cases of strict alternation between two (or more) discrete linguistic systems

(complete with their macro-symbolic meanings) are “the exception rather than the rule” (Gardner-Chloros, 1995, p. 68) in bilingual speech communities. In closely related languages, in particular, high frequencies of bivalent forms — including loans as well as homophonous diamorphs — can contribute to a gradual blurring of language boundaries and an interlingual sharing of forms. In District Six, a history of mixing and convergence has resulted in the formation of a composite “bilingual medium” (p. 192) which is used to mark identity and community solidarity in the neighbourhood. This bilingual form of speech is of interest to the debate about mixed languages (cf. Matras and Baker, 2003), and raises important questions about norm formation and norm stabilization in language contact situations.

2. The essential ingredient: social history (and historiography)

That “it is the sociolinguistic history of speakers, and not the structure of their language, that is the primary determinant of the linguistic outcome of language contact” (Thomason and Kaufman, 1988, p. 35) is a truism of language contact research. This is echoed by McCormick who introduces her volume as a “historically contextualized, sociolinguistic study” of the District Six speech community (p. 5).

The broad historical overview given in Chapter 2 (‘A history of language contact in the Cape Town area’) raises the question of how much time-depth is useful, and indeed necessary, when writing sociolinguistic histories. At first glance one might question McCormick’s decision to include a detailed overview of the pre-settlement and early settlement period of the Cape in a publication which ultimately focuses on English–Afrikaans language contact in the late twentieth century (the 1980s and 1990s). However, McCormick’s broad perspective on historical context fits well with twentieth-century debates and approaches to historical writing which have been strongly influenced by Fernand Braudel’s conception of multiple historical time spans or rhythms. In his major work, *The Mediterranean* (first published 1949), Braudel distinguishes three different historical times: the *longue durée* (long-term systemic structures of human history), the *histoire sociale* (the history of groups and groupings), and the *l’histoire événementielle*, i.e. ‘episodic history’, the short time span or history of events which is “proportionate to individuals, to daily life, to our illusions, to our hasty awareness” (Braudel, 1980, p. 28).

McCormick skillfully interweaves these different time scales in her study. Chapter 2 describes the long-term and middle-term historical structures at the Cape, that is, the distant, pre-settlement movements and social organization of the Khoesan *Sprachbund* which bring into focus the *longue durée* of South African history — the ‘vanishing voices’ (Nettle and Romaine, 2000) of the indigenous population. This is followed by an account of the arrival of European colonists after 1652, the subsequent introduction of slavery, and the development of new structures of social stratification and power in the early eighteenth century. The section of Chapter 2 on ‘Sites of language contact and learning’ (2.3.2), in particular, is of great interest to sociolinguistic historiography: it provides a social history of language contact and

(informal) language learning, and articulates a specifically linguistic perspective on the history of inter-group contact (and conflict) at the Cape.

Indispensable for our understanding of language use in District Six are the sections on ‘The period of transition from Dutch to British control, 1795–1814’ (2.4) and ‘The period of British colonial rule, 1814–1910’ (2.5). The historical developments outlined here have shaped the linguistic landscape of nineteenth- and twentieth-century South Africa: the emergence of an early written tradition of the African languages (strongly influenced by the missionaries’ codification efforts); the rise of Islam among freed slaves in Cape Town and the formation of new religious and social networks in the post-slavery colonial society; the political, social and linguistic anglicization of the Cape after 1806; the development of a racially segregated public school system; the nineteenth century immigration flows from various European nations, Australia, the West Indies and other parts of southern Africa; urbanization and the arrival of a modern (or modernizing) society with new structures of social stratification. Section 2.6 (‘The twentieth century: political factors affecting District Six’) is surprisingly brief in comparison and is primarily an exercise in political history. It outlines the racist and exclusionary politics of apartheid, and their effects on the residential composition of District Six. The twentieth century also saw the standardization and institutionalization of *suiwer* (‘pure’) standard Afrikaans as a marker of Afrikaner identity and political ideology, and the marginalization of coloured speakers of Afrikaans. Attitudes towards standard Afrikaans were therefore ambiguous in District Six. Although most homes in the neighbourhood were traditionally Afrikaans-dominant, rejection of the Afrikaans standard norm during the apartheid era could be emphatic and was often highly political. This is reflected e.g. in the following response of a resident: “The reason why the oppressed people hate the language is because the oppressor is jamming it down his throat” (p. 99). The local, non-standard dialect of Afrikaans, on the other hand, has always commanded strong “covert” prestige and functioned a marker of community solidarity (cf. also Chapter 5 ‘The Chapel Street neighbourhood and its codes, in particular Section 5.5 ‘Attitudes to the standard dialects of Afrikaans and English and to the vernacular in the 1980s’).

English and Cape Dutch/Afrikaans,¹ were in an intense contact situation in the District Six neighbourhood from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. English always had a strong position in the local schools as a medium of instruction, and was generally seen as a means for, and symbol of, social advancement — as a “superior taal” (‘language’), “a medium of exchange better than Afrikaans” (p. 102). The apartheid government’s insistence on mother-tongue instruction led to strong resis-

¹ As noted by McCormick (p. 24, fn. 2): “There is no agreement as to end point of the time span for which the term ‘Cape Dutch’ is appropriate”. The language name *Afrikaans* which situates the local Dutch-lexified vernacular firmly in the colonial society and emphasizes its independence from continental Dutch, became common only during the late nineteenth century (see Deumert, 2004, p. 48).

tance in the community: many parents tried to argue that their homes were in fact English-speaking (despite evidence to the contrary), others attempted to make their homes English-speaking (p. 58).

Chapter 3 ('Perceptions of District Six: the place and its people') shifts the historian's gaze towards the micro-history of place and identity. The chapter is a historical ethnography of the District Six neighbourhood since its establishment in the 1830s, its boundaries and position vis à vis other working-class neighbourhoods, and its much noted ethnic, linguistic and religious (Christian Muslim, and between the 1840s and 1940s also Jewish) mix, and cosmopolitan flair. It is a detailed, "many-voiced" (p. 37) narrative about observed behaviours, local knowledge, customs, social rules and norms within this close-knit bilingual neighbourhood.

McCormick's approach to (socio)historical writing is not unlike Braudel's idea of a *histoire totale* ('total history') — a history of different and overlapping time spans involving both long-term and middle-term structures as well as individual agency in the context of everyday life. The text thus moves from a more structurally-oriented account of inter-group relations in the *longue durée* (Chapter 2) to the micro-history of the neighbourhood (Chapter 3): "the telling of a story about ordinary people in their local setting" (Burke, 1991, p. 241). The sociohistorical overview reflects current directions of historical writing also in its detailed attention to structures of power and marginalization which Crowley (1996) identified as *leitmotifs* of modern (socio-)linguistic historiography.

3. "Language has a setting" (Sapir, 1921): bilingual speech as a locally situated practice

McCormick adopts an explicitly ethnographic, emic perspective to the study of bilingual speech in District Six. Her data from 158 speakers includes not only naturalistic recordings of bilingual speech in a range of informal and formal settings (including meetings and schools), but also interview data reflecting participants' evaluations of, and attitudes towards, the two languages in contact. Most of the data was collected in the 1980s (the last decade of apartheid). A brief follow-up study was conducted in late 1999/early 2000, five years after the first general election in South Africa.

Reflections about the practicalities and contingencies of fieldwork are today an integral and substantive part of the larger academic narrative, and form the background for the interpretation and evaluation of the empirical data. In this case, the political context of apartheid necessitated reliance on local fieldwork assistants as 'insiders' (p. 66), and prevented McCormick from adopting the more familiar ethnographic role of the participant observer:

I did not feel that the option of participant observation as a resident was open to me, being sure that as a middle-class white South African, I would have been regarded with distrust if I had tried to move into the neighbourhood from my home two kilometres away. (p. 68)

McCormick's observations and comments are of relevance to fieldwork design and participant observation in post-colonial societies in general. Socio-economic and educational discrepancies between professional researchers and communities are often severe in such societies, and can disrupt the researcher's ability to establish trust and rapport with members of the community. McCormick therefore opted for a mixed fieldwork design: "being a trusted visiting participant–observer in some domains, and relying on resident informants. . . [in] other domains" (p. 68).

Neighbourhood-focused fieldwork seems to be particularly appropriate for the study of non-dominant communities whose patterns of interaction are embedded in close-knit and highly localized social networks of regular association and interaction (cf. Chapter 3.3 'Greater District Six as a community'). Within these community networks non-standard and marginalized linguistic practices function as markers of solidarity and can develop into a symbol of a separate group identity. In her keen attention to issues of historical domination, socio-political marginalization and identity formation in the context of post-colonial urban language contact, McCormick's ethnographic approach is reminiscent of Zentella's (1997, p. 13) idea of 'anthropolitical linguistics':

[T]o understand and facilitate a stigmatized group's attempts to construct a positive self within an economic and political context that relegates its members to static and disparaged ethnic, racial, and class identities, and that identifies them with static and disparaged linguistic codes . . . Anthropolitical linguistics includes a focus on a community's political economy of code-choice: how bilinguals use language(s) to "construct and display multiple identities, to understand their historic position, and to respond to relations of domination between groups" . . .

Just as in District Six, residents of El Barrio (New York City's East Harlem) show a "seamless welding" of the two languages (Spanish and English) of the community (Zentella, 1997, p. 1). Bilingual speech in both neighbourhoods shows continuous and versatile linguistic mixing and switching by what Zentella (p. 134) has called "adept bilingual jugglers".

The careful ethnographic approach is further motivated by a need to understand the social, historical and linguistic distinctiveness of Cape Town's coloured working-class communities. McCormick argues that the bilingual practices which characterize District Six speech are unique in English-Afrikaans language contact:

What led me to embark on this case study was an interest in the apparently seamless switching from language to language that is characteristic of some Cape Town communities, but was unknown in the bilingual community near Johannesburg where I grew up. (p. xii)

In other words, although bilingual speech as a phenomenon occurs across the Afrikaans-English speech community (irrespective of ethnic origin), its realization in Cape Town's coloured working-class communities (including also the Cape Flats and the Bo-Kaap) can be considered to be sociolinguistically unique (cf. also Stone, 2003, p. 381).

4. Are languages ciphers? Meaning and rationality in bilingual speech

McCormick shares with other code-switching researchers a focus on meaning and speaker intentionality. This is evident in her adoption (p. 6 and 89) of Alvarez-Cácamo's (1998) distinction between *code switching* (socially indexical or stylistically meaningful language alternation) and *language-switching* (the “meaningless”, “non-significant” juxtaposition of languages by fluent bilinguals). In other words, the sociolinguistic classification of language alternation depends not merely on the hybrid linguistic structure of the utterance (e.g. insertional vs. alternational CS patterns), but on the way these language choices intentionally modify pragmatic meaning and redefine the social context in which speech occurs. In her analysis of bilingual speech McCormick draws on two quite distinct research traditions: Myers-Scotton's Markedness Model (MM) and Conversation Analysis (CA) as developed by Gumperz (1982); Auer (1984, 1995, 1998) and Li Wei (1998, 2002).

According to the MM (Myers-Scotton, 1993, 1998), speakers select linguistic forms from a pre-existing and conventionalized “opportunity set” of codes, complete with their social and symbolic meanings (including sociolinguistic markedness values). Speakers generally make choices to enhance rewards and to minimize “costs”, that is, to optimize the inter-personal outcome of a given interaction. Myers-Scotton views speech as a special type of rational behaviour, and to explain code-switching is therefore to uncover the (semantically explicable and rational) intentions that “cause” or “motivate” code selections: “the engine driving linguistic choices is rationality, a mechanism universally available to humans” (Myers-Scotton and Bolonyai, 2001, p. 5; cf. also Myers-Scotton, 1998).

However, rational-choice explanations of human agency — although “the default mode of social theorizing” (Wagner, 2000) — are not universally valid and have come under considerable criticism. A fundamental problem of rational-choice explanations is that they cannot be falsified: they are observer-centred construals of what could or might have motivated a given actor in a given situation or context.² Moreover, rational choice models of behaviour tend to underestimate the importance of action by habit (iterative actions leading to the stabilization of linguistic and other behavioural regularities), action as norm-following (cf. Taylor, 1990), and the role of emotions in shaping human agency (Archer, 2000). The MM is further based on the idea that human communication can be described as a basically unproblematic process of message encoding and decoding, using fixed and uniform form-meaning pairings. However, this so-called telementational model of communication falls prey to what Harris (1981) has called the “fixed-code fallacy”; that is, the idea that all individuals in a speech community necessarily attach the same — or at least similar — meanings to linguistic forms, and that the listener will thus be able to attribute

² For a sociological critique of rational-choice models of human action see the papers in Archer and Tritter (2000); for a critique of the idea that actions are motivated by intentional state(s) (cf. Churchland, 1981 and Dennett, 1991); for a critique of rational explanations of code-switching (cf. Stroud, 1992).

the “correct” signification of a given language alternation when they decode messages.

A rather different approach to code-switching is found in the CA tradition which often positions itself in direct opposition to the MM: meaning is not seen as fixed and “brought along”, but as constructed and created (“brought about”) in the context of conversational encounters. When selecting linguistic forms speakers do not simply “index” their intentions and social identities through language choice, rather they “create” meaning and identities within the locally bound constraints of the interaction. The aim of CA is to reconstruct how participants’ language choices unfold and become meaningful within the sequential organization of talk.³ Code-switched utterances are understood as “contextualization cues” (Gumperz, 1982), and are used not unlike other linguistic and paralinguistic resources in a speech community’s repertoire. It has been argued that the CA approach with its attention to micro-level analysis and emic categories dispenses with the “motivational speculation” of MM rational choice explanations (Li Wei, 1998, p. 169; cf. also Auer, 1984). However, this seems to be an overly optimistic assessment as the focus on micro-level, turn-by-turn analysis of language choices still relies on the reconstruction of plausible, yet hypothetical, intention-action sequences through which speakers construct meaning sequentially in situated interactions.

McCormick draws on both the MM and CA in her discussion of code-switching in District Six, and illustrates how these two analytical approaches constitute complementary rather than exclusive perspectives on CS and meaning. Languages in contact often develop macro-structural meanings (or associations) which are a consequence and reflection of their social and historical power relationships, and the prestige they command within the community. As noted above, English functions as a H variety in District Six, and is perceived as the language of social and educational mobility. Afrikaans, on the other hand, is the majority home language and as such commands a range of informal “we-code” functions. In formal and institutional speech events the macro-sociolinguistic meanings of English and Afrikaans appear to be largely “brought along” and are relatively “fixed”. The interview data on language preferences, attitudes and choices shows that there are clear community norms regarding the appropriateness of language choice in formal contexts. The following examples come from what McCormick calls “formally constituted meetings”— a sociolinguistic domain where English is clearly the preferred language, however, Afrikaans can be used strategically in arguments and to signal community solidarity. McCormick’s discussion of language use in these contexts is articulated within the explanatory framework of rational choice theory: speakers consciously

³ The CA approach to language and meaning shows similarities not only to ethnomethodology (cf. Li Wei, 2002), but also to Harris’ integrational project (cf. Harris (1996, p. 7): “For the integrationist there is no sign [i.e. meaning] without a context, and contexts are not given in advance. Signs, in short, are not waiting to be ‘used’: they are created in and by the act of communication.”

and unconsciously draw on the “brought along” meanings of the two codes within the temporal constraints of the interaction.

H is from an Afrikaans-speaking family. His use of English in the meeting seems to be connected with his consciousness of his role as a chairperson. When the consciousness slips and he begins to become embroiled in argument, he slips into the code which is perceived (as interviews showed) as one best suited for accommodating strong emotions, i.e. the local dialect of Afrikaans. (p. 170)

Since C is actually English-speaking, his switching to the vernacular is not primarily to give him greater fluency — he would have that in his home language. It is more likely to be an indication that he is abiding by communal norms concerning the most appropriate language for forceful but not distancing argument with peers. (pp. 171–172)

It seems likely that the switch to Afrikaans would be an aspect of trying to create or tap existing solidarity among the other committee members. Having had the apparently supportive intervention of C... perhaps N is looking to strengthen her base. (p. 175)

Whereas code-switching is used skillfully as a tool for the creation of interpersonal alliances in these formal meetings, it serves mainly stylistic and discourse-organizational functions in informal conversations (pp. 162–164; 178–185). Discourse-related CS is observed in both children and adults, and signals, for example, shifts in topic, footing, quotation, emphasis, semantic contrast and voicing: “language changes often coincide with the beginning of a new structural unit in a narrative or argument... Language switches seem to be used primarily for structural and stylistic purposes, rather than for indexing acts of identity or associations with features in the wider context” (p. 180, 181).

Although McCormick couches aspects of her analysis in terms of rational speaker agency, she remains admirably aware of the limits and problems of rational-choice explanations in bilingual speech communities. Language alternation, as argued by McCormick, is not a unitary phenomenon but can reflect various degrees of intentionality, ranging from “deliberate exploitation of the associations that the languages have in the speech community” to a “subliminal awareness” of code switching as a means for style and discourse organization, and finally to the use of “a bilingual medium” in which individual switches do not carry any social or stylistic meaning (p. 192). The macro-sociolinguistic meanings which the two codes command in formal contexts are weak in conversational language use where their macro-linguistic charge and their polarized meanings (H variety or solidarity code) can be “switched off”. Commenting on an example of language alternation by a bilingual child (S) talking to herself, McCormick reflects on the limitations of third-person observer explanations of bilingual speech:

I do not have a strong hunch as to why S switches languages here. Perhaps the switches function subliminally to distinguish the segments of her thought processes, or the speakers in her voiced internal dialogue? On the other hand, this

may be an example of a bilingual person ‘let(ting) down the mental barriers between two languages’. (p. 165)

McCormick’s careful approach to sociolinguistic interpretation is reminiscent of Auer’s (1984, p. 105) cautionary assessment of CA analysis: “There is a certain danger for the pendulum to swing too far . . . , i.e. to treat each and every instance of language alternation as meaningful in the same ‘semantic way’”. However, this opens up a range of new questions: How do we know which code alternations to exclude legitimately from our analysis? What are the contextual criteria for assigning individual switches to the “not meaningful” (and thus “not interpretable”) category? Is any language alternation for which we can construct a plausible explanation in terms of speaker intentionality necessarily meaningful to the speaker and the interlocutor(s)? In other words, if we acknowledge that language alternation is not always meaningful in conversation, this also means that we will need to establish clear diagnostic criteria which allow us to determine when a language alternation is meaningful to participants.

Occasionally the data seem somewhat more ambiguous than is acknowledged by McCormick. At a rugby club meeting, where English would be the appropriate code choice — except for dispute, argument and the enactment of solidarity — one of the participants (H) is described as switching into English when he takes over the floor and formally introduces his proposal: “as he comes up with a proposal (starting at [line] 154), he switches into English”. However, his actual opening of the proposal sequence in line 154 is not a clear-cut switch into English, but a mixed English–Afrikaans utterance which precedes the macro-symbolically meaningful and strategic switch into English. Is (1) simply an example of “meaningless” language alternation which can be ignored in the CS analysis?

(1) unless *ons doen dit die way* [‘unless we do it this way’] (p. 169)

Single item switches as illustrated (1) are not at the centre of McCormick’s study, and her quantitative analysis (p. 187) explicitly excludes “the single-word insertions of local non-standard Afrikaans which has absorbed a great deal of English vocabulary”. That single-item switches are an important aspect and category of bilingual speech was emphasized by Poplack and Meechan (1995, p. 200) who observed that insertions — including both established borrowings and nonce borrowings — “constitute the richest portion of any bilingual corpus systematically studied”. Based on meta-linguistic information provided by members of the speech community (e.g. p. 170), McCormick classifies single-item switches in a number of cases as loans. Reliance on bilingual speaker intuition can, however, be problematic. Gardner-Chloros (1995, p. 74), who used native judges in the Alsace, reports that native speakers rarely agree on the status of individual words:

When a team of three native judges were presented with a list of French words used in Alsatian conversations (and vice versa) and asked to classify them as loans, code-switches or place them in an in-between category, they only agreed among themselves in approximately one third of cases.

Loans play an important role in the District Six data as so-called bridges, i.e. functionally specialized single-item switches which facilitate language alternation within an utterance. Bridges are bivalent linguistic units (including homophonous diamorphs) “on which the transition from one language to another takes place — the bridge itself is not the exclusive property of either language” (p. 191). McCormick’s notion of bilingual bridges is similar to Clyne’s (1967, 2003, p. 162ff.) concept of trigger-words, i.e. “lexical items that can be identified as being part of more than one language for the speaker or for some section of, or the entire speech community” and that “may facilitate a transversion from one language to another” (Clyne, 2003, p. 162). Clyne gives an example (2) from Croatian–English code-switching in Australia. In this case the noun *college*, which belongs simultaneously to the lexicon of Australian–Croatian and Australian English, triggers an alternational switch from Croatian to English.

- (2) *ima ovaj, razne te, kao ovu colleges around, there are a couple of campuses*
[there is, this these, various like these ...] (Clyne, 2003: 163)

Example (3) comes from McCormick’s District Six data (p. 191): the indefinite article is a homophonous diamorph in District Six speech and cannot be assigned phonetically to either of the two languages. It functions as bridge (or trigger word) and facilitates the alternational switch into English.

- (3) *dit gee hulle n/a sense of solidarity*
[this gives them ...]

The other two examples given by McCormick to illustrate the function of bridges in the data are rather more complex. They raise questions about the predictability of switching, and the status of bridges/trigger words as explanatory concepts. In example (4) *happiness*, which is classified by McCormick as a “long established loanword”, is interpreted as a lexical bridge which facilitates the alternational switch into English at the periphery of the utterance. In example (5) the bridge is located in the well-established loan phrase ‘*s all right*.

- (4) *dis waar want ek enjoy myself ja ek lyk happiness I like to be happy*
[it’s true because I enjoy myself yes I like ...]
- (5) *as ons daai ticketskan verkoop kry s all right then we got it*
[if we can get those tickets sold ...]

However, why do *enjoy* in (4) and *tickets* in (5) not function as bridges in these utterances? The verb *enjoy*, for example, is common in mixed Afrikaans–English speech and has considerable time depth (cf. Deumert, 2004 for nineteenth and early twentieth century evidence; the mixed participle form *geënjoy* was a common nineteenth century stereotype of bilingual speech). It would thus be reasonable to argue

that *enjoy* also belongs to the lexicon of both languages and could, in principle, have functioned as a bridge in (4). In addition, *myself* (4), which follows *enjoy*, is a homophonous diamorph and belongs structurally to both languages — what prevented it from functioning as a bridge and as a trigger for a shift to English in this utterance?

While the notion of bridges (or trigger words) is a useful *post hoc* device for the description of CS data, it is not a predictive explanatory concept. The District Six data shows a general inter-lingual sharing of lexical forms and clusters of potential — but not always realized — bridges. In socio-historical contexts of extensive and intensive bilingualism, we can expect that several language contact phenomena “are going on at the same time” (Muysken, 1995, p. 188), including lexical borrowing, code-switching, L1 interference, calquing, and convergence. In other words, different inter-lingual phenomena interact and individual language contact processes and outcomes cannot always “be neatly parcelled off” (Gardner-Chloros, 1995, p. 70) from one another in complex bilingual communities. In District Six there seems to be a finely graded continuum from socially and stylistically meaningful and strategic CS to (pragmatically meaningless) language mixing and bilingual convergence.

5. From CS to mixed languages: the debate is open

McCormick comments repeatedly on the “permeability of language boundaries” (p. 4) and the “unusual level of interweaving of the two languages” (p. 189): “At times the two languages are so seamlessly interwoven that it would seem that they must be part of a single mental system” (p. 199). The following statement by one of the neighbourhood’s residents could be interpreted as a naïve description of a mixed language in the sense of Bakker and Mous (1994), i.e. a language “showing a combination of the grammatical system (phonology, morphology, syntax) of one language with the lexicon of another language” (Bakker and Mous, 1994, p. 4 and 5).

‘I am Afrikaans-speaking’, said Ms A, ‘but the thing is, when I speak Afrikaans, I use English words most of the time.’ (p. 1)

Language contact can produce *hybrid utterances* (code-switching) as well as *hybrid languages* (pidgins/creoles, mixed languages and lingua francas). Since the early 1990s there has been considerable academic interest in the study of what has been called (dual ancestry) mixed languages. These languages show a linguistic split between structural categories (most prototypically lexicon and grammar come from different ancestry languages). Examples which have been discussed extensively in the literature include Michif (Canada), Media Lengua (Ecuador), Ma’a (Tanzania), Copper Island Aleut (Russia), and Anglo-Romani (United Kingdom). However, there are problems with the idea of a well-defined mixed language prototype as the small sample of attested languages is structurally heterogeneous. Michif and Media Lengua conform most closely to the original idea of a lexicon–grammar split. Yet, in Michif the split is not between lexicon and grammar, but between noun

phrase (French) and verb phrase (Cree). A noun–verb opposition also underlies the structure of Copper Island Aleut: verbal inflection is derived from Russian, nominal morphology is Aleut.

The degree of lexical re-orientation (Matras, 2000) in mixed languages is also less uniform than suggested by Bakker and Mous' (1994) original threshold of over 90% of lexical elements from the language which does not provide the grammatical structures. Thomason (2001, p. 200), for example, has argued that in the case of Ma'a "about half of the vocabulary is Bantu", with only the basic vocabulary being almost entirely Cushitic. In the case of Anglo-Romani the grammar is English and the lexicon is described as "also mostly English", but including Romani core vocabulary (ibid.). Petjo (spoken in Java and described by Van Rheedem, 1994) has a lexicon which includes two-third Dutch forms and one-third Malay. In Copper Island Aleut lexical reorientation is different for verbs and nouns: over 90% of verbs and over 60% of nouns are Aleut (Thomason, 2001, p. 203).

Heavy borrowing and code-switching have been postulated as important mechanisms which underlie the development of mixed languages. According to Thomason and Kaufman (1988) some mixed languages, such as Ma'a or Anglo-Romani, have arisen gradually in language shift scenarios characterized by intense borrowing. Other types of mixed languages have been interpreted as "frozen" CS, representing the end-point of a gradual development from pragmatically meaningful CS via high-frequency language mixing to the grammaticalization and conventionalization of a mixed language (Auer, 1999; Gardner-Chloros, 2000; Myers-Scotton, 2003; Thomason, 2003). According to Auer (1999), high frequencies of code juxtaposition gradually weaken its ability to function as a contextualization cue, and the mixed code itself eventually stabilizes as a new form of speech in the repertoire of the bilingual community, where it can even replace the ancestry languages (e.g. in the case of Michif). In the transition phase both "old" (socially or stylistically meaningful) CS behaviour and "new" patterns of unmarked language mixing co-exist. Examples of this intermediate stage include e.g. Puerto Rican speech in El Barrio (Zentella, 1997), Italoschwyz (spoken by second generation migrants in the German-speaking part of Switzerland, Franceschini, 1998) and Yanito (spoken in Gibraltar) (see also Backus, 2000, 2003 on a Turkish–Dutch mixed lect used by young male migrants to the Netherlands).

The idea of a continuum from heavy borrowing or CS to mixed languages is attractive and intuitively plausible. However, both scenarios have been rejected by Bakker (2003) who has argued that there is no evidence for languages which show gradual vocabulary replacement thus closing the gap between heavy borrowing (less than 45%) and the 90% figure given for prototypical mixed languages: "The lack of documentation of a transitional phase in ... the genesis of mixed languages speaks against the hypothesis of a slow development" (Bakker, 2003, p. 130). However, as noted above, some of the languages which have been classified as mixed languages show lexical replacement figures which are below the 90% threshold, e.g. Ma'a, Anglo-Romani, Petjo, Copper Island Aleut (for nouns only).

Possible evidence for a borrowing continuum is presented by Stolz (2003) in his lexical analysis of Chamorro (Guam, Mariana Islands) and Malti (Malta). Both

languages emerged gradually and the intensity of mixing increased diachronically. With regard to lexical reorientation Chamorro and Malti might well fall into a 50–60% range for vocabulary replacement, i.e. above heavy borrowing and below the 90% mixed language threshold. Stolz (2003, p. 212) concludes:

If a language can become ever more mixed over a long period of time, there is a fair chance that full-blown mixed languages may develop this way, too. If the degree of mixture can increase step by step, the process may come to a halt anywhere on the scale/continuum The two languages [Chamorro and Malti] do not form a distinct third category in the contact typology, but rather show that this typology is a continuum.

Whereas the path from (heavy) borrowing to mixed languages is gradual and linear, the path from CS to mixed languages might well be relatively abrupt (i.e. emergence within one or two generations), and does not appear to be linear in the same way. This was noted by Backus (2003) who has argued that there is a fundamental conceptual problem with Auer's (1999) original suggestion of a linear continuum from CS to mixed language:

[S]table mixed languages look like extremely dense *insertional* CS (in which an embedded language is inserted into a matrix language utterance); yet, the situation of intense language contact from which they may be assumed to result, tend to produce much *alternational* CS (where the switch is at a clause or a sentence boundary) For mixed lects to become Mixed Languages, therefore, they must lose what I will call their "alternational component". (Backus, 2003, p. 237, 240)

In other words, what happens to alternational CS in the transition from CS and high-frequency language mixing (which shows both alternational and insertional patterns of language mixing) to mixed languages (which only show the insertional pattern)?

The possible historical trajectories are summarized in Fig. 1, which expands Auer's (1999) original model. Indicated in the figure are also examples which have been cited in the literature as transition varieties between CS/borrowing and mixed languages. So far we have no systematic evidence for stage C, i.e. a stage characterized by the loss of alternational CS and an emerging dominance of the insertional patterns, including basic, everyday vocabulary.

Is there reason to believe that the bilingual medium used by residents of the District Six neighbourhood could be a putative mixed language *in statu nascendi*? McCormick suggests that the bilingual vernacular "could be regarded as mixed code" (p. 92, 180). However, she rejects the interpretation of the local vernacular as a mixed language for two reasons: lack of norm stability and lexical mixing below the 90% threshold.

Bilingual speech in District Six appears to stretch across all three CS scenarios illustrated in Fig. 1, covering simultaneously stage A (meaningful CS behaviour), B (regular and high-frequency alternational as well as insertional language mixing) and C (regular insertional language mixing). A possible example of stage C is given

Code-Switching Scenario			Mixed Languages	
STAGE A Code-Switching ❖ insertional and alternational CS ❖ language juxtaposition is socially meaningful and/or marks discourse function	STAGE B Mixed Lect (1) ❖ CS as an unmarked choice ❖ high frequencies of both insertional and alternational CS ❖ CS no longer socially or stylistically meaningful	STAGE C Mixed Lect (2) ❖ gradual decrease of alternational CS ❖ increasing density of insertional CS and numerous nonce borrowings in the basic vocabulary	Incipient ML ❖ grammaticalization of insertional CS/ borrowing ❖ frequencies of lexical insertion still below the 90% mark stipulated by Bakker & Mous (1994) for prototypical mixed languages	Fully crystallized ML ❖ matrix-language turnover ❖ lexical density approaches 90% ❖ grammar-lexicon split
Borrowing/Language Shift Scenario ❖ replacement of inherited linguistic material in a situation of linguistic domination ❖ nonce borrowings as well as established borrowings				

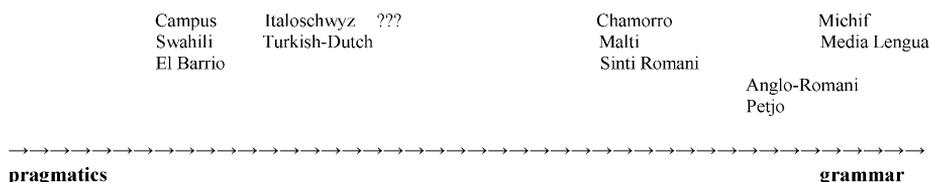


Fig. 1. From code-switching to mixed languages (for Campus Swahili cf. Blommaert, 1992; English–Spanish CS in El Barrio, Zentella, 1997; Italoschwyz, Franceschini, 1998; Turkish–Dutch, Backus, 2003; Chamorro and Malti, Stolz, 2003; Petjo, Van Rheedeen, 1994; the Sinti-Romani data is discussed by Auer, 1999; information on Anglo-Romani can be found in Thomason, 2001).

in (6) which McCormick describes in her explication as an instantiation of “the vernacular”, i.e. a bilingual language mode involving Afrikaans grammar and numerous lexical insertions from English.

- (6) *die selectors pick die team nê nê*
dan gaat die team na die chairman en president toe
as die chairman en president nie satisfied is met die team nie
dan stuur hulle die weer na die selectors
toe met name uit
of waar hulle voel changes moet
gemaak word
dan moet die selectors weer die team pick
dan stuur hulle dit weer na die chairman en president toe
toe hulle satisfied is (p. 171)

[‘the selectors pick the team don’t they,
 then the team goes to the chairman and president
 and if the chairman and president are not satisfied with the team
 then they send it back to the selectors
 with names removed,
 or where they feel changes should be made
 then the selectors have to pick the team again
 then they send it back to the chairman and president
 until they are satisfied]

The pattern of language alternation in (6) diverges significantly from Backus (2003) analysis of Turkish–Dutch code-switching. Backus data showed no more than one-third of Dutch content words in the Turkish frame. Moreover, the Dutch words were all lexical additions (hospital terminology) and there was no lexical replacement of basic vocabulary. Bakker (2003, p. 129) has re-formulated this as a general guideline in his argument against a CS origin of mixed languages:

[T]he semantic nature of the embedded lexicon used in a matrix framework is different [from that of mixed languages]. The switched lexicon is typically not primarily from the basic, everyday vocabulary, but from the more specific local culture . . . In codeswitching the switched words are often additional to the lexicon of the matrix language, whereas they are replaced in mixed languages.

Example (6), however, shows switched lexical items from the everyday vocabulary. While terms such *president*, *chairman*, *team* and *selectors* belong to the jargon of the Rugby Club meeting and are best described as lexical additions, other English words are clearly part of the basic vocabulary and have a general, non-specific meaning in (6): *pick* (Afrik. *kies*, *uitsoek*), *satisfied* (Afrik. *tevrede*), *change* (Afrik. *verandering*). Moreover, the overall count for (6) shows an emerging split between content and function words which is reminiscent of the compartmentalization described for mixed languages: English words clearly dominate in the category of content words where 18 out of 24 words are English (75%); function words are exclusively Afrikaans.⁴

A second example (p. 169) in which the speaker is described as using “the vernacular” shows a broadly similar pattern. However, in this case (7) we also see alternational switches into English (underlined), fulfilling broadly discourse-organizational functions (repetition and topic definition) in the conversational context. It should be noted that the speech event is not continuous but stretches over several turns (the numbers indicate the place of these turns in the overall sequence).

⁴ Nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs were counted as content words, auxiliaries, connectors, pronouns, prepositions and determiners were counted as function words. The auxiliary *is* is a homophonous diamorph and was excluded from the count.

- (7) 99 *ek dink dat die—die manager se duties*
sal wees om te manage die team
op die veld on the field
- 101 also
once a team has been picked
dan vat hy die team oor
from then on *hy is responsible*
vir daai
- 103 right
- 107 *wat is sy powers*
- 113 *wil julle die manager hé*
dat hy daai duties kan
perform
of gaat ons hom restrict
- 115 *dat hy nie authority het*
om met vryheid die team te
change nie

[I think that the manager's duties
shall be to manage the team
on the field
also
once the team has been picked
than he takes over the team
from then on he is responsible
for those
what are his powers
do you want to manager
to be able to perform these duties
or are we going to restrict him
that he does not have the authority
to change the team freely]

Again, there is an overall density of English insertions, together with a dominance of English content words (over two-thirds) and Afrikaans function words. As in example (6), lexical re-orientation rather than simply lexical addition characterizes this sequence of utterances: *duty* (Afrik. *plig, verpligting*), *responsible* (Afrik. *verantwoordelik*), *power* (Afrik. *krag, reg*), *perform* (Afrik. *verrig, vervul, uitvoer*), *restrict* (Afrik. *beperk*), *authority* (Afrik. *mag, owerheid*), *change* (see above).

McCormick's study also provides ample evidence for phonological as well as syntactic convergence in the District Six vernacular. On the surface examples (8) and (9) look like cases of alternational code-switching at a syntactic boundary (i.e. after the VP). However, the syntax of the first example conforms to the norms of English (in

standard Afrikaans the past participle *gesien* would be in sentence-final position); the second example conforms to the norms of Afrikaans (cf. also McCormick's Appendix 7: 'Linguistic features of local non-standard varieties of Afrikaans and English').

(8) *mense het gesien* your death certificate ('people have seen') (p. 190)

(9) *ek wil* all my life story imagine ('I want to') (p. 190)

Bilingual mixed languages typically arise in two-language contact situations characterized by widespread community and individual bilingualism (e.g. in immigrant groups and indigenous linguistic minorities). Their function is to affirm the speakers' hybrid bilingual and bicultural identity, i.e. an identity which is distinct from both cultures whose languages are spoken by the community.

The socio-historical situation in District Six provided fertile grounds for the emergence and stabilization of a mixed language. Coloured ethnicity as constructed by the colonial administrators and implemented e.g. in the census categories from the mid-1800s was extremely heterogeneous, including not only the descendants of the ethnically diverse slave population, but also the indigenous Khoe as well as everyone who could not be classified unambiguously as being either black (African) or white. Ross (1982) has argued that the specific nature of Cape slavery, which saw the distribution of slaves over isolated small-holdings rather than large plantations, inhibited the emergence of a distinct Cape slave culture and identity in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. However, a decidedly politicized coloured identity emerged in Cape Town in the late nineteenth century, culminating in the foundation of the *African Political Organization* (APO) in 1902 (Adhikari, 1992; Bickford-Smith, 1993). Policies of segregation and exclusion before and after 1948 contributed further to the focusing of an oppositional coloured identity. McCormick (p. 96) has suggested that CS and language mixing in District Six can be interpreted as symbolic markers of an ethnically mixed identity and as a provocative response to the apartheid government's obsession with purity: "mixing and switching are consonant with a rejection of concern for racial, ethnic or linguistic purity, and with a concomitant acceptance of heterogeneous roots".

The mixed Afrikaans–English vernacular shows considerable time-depth and stylized representations of mixed Afrikaans–English speech are attested in the popular colonial literature from the mid-nineteenth century onwards (cf. Mesthrie, 1993). In the periodical press and other metalinguistic treatises nineteenth and (early) twentieth century commentators remarked on the emerging bilingual practices in ethnically-mixed areas such as District Six and the growing use of English among the Afrikaner youth (cf. Deumert, 2004, Chapter 8). However, within the white community anti-English attitudes proliferated after the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902) and Afrikaans–English mixing became highly stigmatized. Bilingual speech was increasingly associated with coloured speakers. LeRoux (1944, p. 42), for example, maintains in the 1940s that code-mixing/switching is typical only of the coloured Afrikaans 'dialect'. He illustrates this with a *diensmeide-sinnetjie* ('housemaid's sentence') which symbolically locates the variety as a marker of a specific socio-

economic and ethnic group. Structurally this stereotypical utterance is similar to the insertional language mixing described by McCormick: “En *besides* ek moet nog *clean towels* in the *gentlemen se room* gaan sit” (‘And besides, I still need to put clean towels in the gentlemen’s room’). In the second half of the twentieth century the struggle writers and poets Adam Small, Peter Snyders and Wopko Jensma popularized the mixed vernacular as medium of literary usage, and contributed to its stabilization as a marker of coloured identity and cultural expression. The following is an extract from Adam Small’s poem *Second Coming II* from his collection *Sé sjibbolet* (‘Say Shibboleth’, 1963; Afrikaans in italics).

Innie press-conference
wat gafollow *het*
het *hy* *ga*-apologise
en sincere regrets *ga*-express
lat *hy* *dié* assignment *so lank* *moes* cancel,
hy’t *werklik* *ga* try *sy* *bes*
ma *sus* *hy* *ga*-explain *het*
’n celebrity follow *nie* *sy* *eie* *nie*
ma *sy* Manager *se* *wil*.

[In the press-conference
 which followed
 he apologized
 and expressed sincere regrets
 that he had to cancel that assignment in the meantime,
 he really tried his best,
 but as he explained
 a celebrity doesn’t follow his own
 but his manager’s will]

This brings me to a final point in the debate about mixed languages, namely, the question of speaker agency: deliberate choice and conscious — often playful — creation is believed to have played a significant role in the history of mixed languages (cf. Golovko, 2003; Thomason, 2001, 2003). The playful and creative character of language use in Cape Town’s coloured working-class communities was noted by Stone (2003, p. 391) who has conducted fieldwork in these neighbourhoods since the 1960s:

I suggest that the dialect constitutes linguistic bricolage. The ‘ends’, the ‘standard’ dialects from which it is composed, are appropriated and adeptly made to constitute a new ‘means’, the working-class dialect, under the noses (so to speak) of the sanctimoniously dominant from whom it is taken. The processes of construction are partly serious, rule-bound and consequential, and partly creative, playful, whimsical and unpredictable, and the two processes interweave and oscillate in unstable equilibrium . . .

In his “Notes”, which are printed in Appendix 6 of *Language in District Six*, Stone also comments on *Wheatie*, a mixed English–Afrikaans form of speech typically used by young male residents of District Six who identified themselves as “members of a uniquely long-standing working-class urban elite” (pp. 215–216).

Linguistically [they] . . . saw themselves as bricoleurs (Lévi-Strauss), adventurous craftsmen ingeniously cobbling together language that was not only communicatively viable but aesthetically satisfying from whatever varied middle-class linguistic and cultural elements were available . . . “Wheatie” connotes . . . expressive talk . . . which delights and impresses by virtue of its fluency, vivacity, wit, intelligence and oratorical power to move the listener . . .

In sum, the sociohistorical context — i.e. a politically marginalized bilingual community of mixed ethnic heritage — and the observed propensity for language play and creativity suggests that the conditions for the emergence of a mixed language were present in District Six. However, as noted by Thomason (2003, p. 36), mixed language genesis and stabilization are not predictable in language history:

Speakers of an ethnic group that is emerging in a bilingual context may choose to create a bilingual mixed language to serve as the symbol of their new group; they may also choose not to do so. Now, and for the foreseeable future we have no way to narrow down the possible choices.

In the case of District Six we seem to be dealing with a case of partial emergence. Mixed languages remain ephemeral, transitional phenomena in many speech communities and can pre-date the full assimilation of a minority group into the majority culture. However, despite their lack of stabilization these mixed forms of speech are often perceived as distinct codes by the speakers themselves. In the case of District Six the terms *kombuistaal* (‘kitchen language’) and *Kaaps* indicate that speakers assign labels to the bilingual medium, “and by doing so, confirm not only their noticing but also the nature of this way of speaking as a ‘stable’ . . . practice” (Gafaranga and Torras, 2002, p. 4) within the speech community’s repertoire (cf. the following characterization of *kombuistaal* by a resident: “which is *Afrikaans en Engels ge mix*”, p. 93). In District Six, the stabilization of the mixed code as a community language was continuously interrupted by the residents’ knowledge and reproduction of the borders and boundaries of the prestigious (standard) linguistic market in formal contexts where the macro-symbolic meanings of the two languages remained relatively intact and clearly differentiated. This is the sociolinguistic paradox which pervades, according to McCormick’s careful ethnographic analysis, language use in the neighbourhood: the “two languages are simultaneously polarized (symbolically and functionally) and blended” (p. 1).

6. Conclusion: and the future?

As regards the future trajectories of language use in District Six McCormick touches repeatedly on the question of whether practices of CS and language mixing

will give way to language shift in the context of the continuing prestige and growing hegemony of English in post-1994 South Africa. There are some indications for an incipient language shift in the District Six speech community:

- (a) In the interviews residents described Afrikaans as the language typically used by older residents, whereas younger residents would generally speak English (p. 116).
- (b) An age-graded shift from Afrikaans to English was observed among siblings. E.g. “A 19-year-old said that he was Afrikaans-speaking but that his younger brother and sisters were English-speaking” (p. 114).
- (c) In the 1980s (during the first and most intensive fieldwork period) McCormick found that school children were increasingly English-dominant, adolescents were bilingual and those in their 30s and above were usually Afrikaans-dominant (p. 120).

When McCormick returned to the neighbourhood in late 1999, English had become the medium of instruction in all local schools. However, English–Afrikaans language mixing continues to be a salient characteristic of the local vernacular and functions as a marker of community solidarity: “in spite of their increased immersion in English, the neighbourhood’s children are still acquiring the vernacular and using it with their peers . . . it is still not acceptable to speak standard English or standard Afrikaans in informal interactions with local friends” (p. 127).

As a sociolinguist and language historian I am grateful to Kay McCormick for bringing the history and the contemporary context of the District Six speech community to the attention of a wide audience in sociolinguistics and language contact studies. *Language in District Six* is a stimulating, insightful and highly readable sociolinguistic and ethnographic case study which provides, in the terminology of Geertz (1972), a *thick description* of the complex interactions between history, identity and language use in this bilingual speech community. *Language in District Six* deserves a place on our bookshelves and desks.

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