

Contact-induced changes in the languages of the wider Lake Chad region – What can they tell us about the speaker’s social interaction?

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Synchronically the wider Lake Chad region is characterised by intense multilingualism among individual speakers. In addition to this, we can show that long term language contact resulted in various contact-induced linguistic phenomena. Kanuri, the westernmost language of the Saharan branch, has been in contact with languages of the Lake Chad region for several centuries, esp. Hausa and other Chadic languages. By the same token, Fulfulde speaking people started to immigrate into northern Nigeria some 500 years ago, and finally established the Emirate of Adamawa in Cameroon and Nigeria in the eighteenth century.

Social, cultural, and economic contacts, etc. led to multilingualism and the mutual transfer of linguistic features between Kanuri, Fulfulde, and their neighbouring Chadic languages. The transfer of linguistic features is visible in several domains, e.g. borrowing of content words, borrowing of function words and borrowing of derivational affixes. However, linguistic transfer is not restricted to form-meaning units, but also concerns replication of structural and semantic features, i.e. transfer of mere meanings (including grammatical meanings and functions).

In my presentation I will first of all give a brief overview of attested contact phenomena, and then address the question whether there is a specific model of language contact which can account for the linguistic contact phenomena in the wider Lake Chad region, or whether we have to integrate different models (e.g. borrowing, contact-induced grammaticalization, metatypy) to explain the outcomes of language contact adequately.

Finally, I will raise the question whether a direct correlation can be drawn between the type of social setting and the structural outcomes of contact in the wider Lake Chad region. It is reasonable, and probably beyond controversy, that social parameters have an impact on the emergence of speaker’s multilingual repertoires and consequently on language structure. However, in the absence of detailed studies concentrating on speaker’s social interaction and its correlation with linguistic behavior in the wider Lake Chad region, only some preliminary ideas can be presented.