

From Linguistic Areas to Areal Linguistics

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From Linguistic Areas to Areal Linguistics
Edited by Pieter Muysken

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Introduction

Conceptual and methodological issues in areal linguistics

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1. Preliminary

This book aims at further exploring the approach to language description and comparison in terms of the regional context in which languages are spoken. It does this by presenting a number of case studies in areal linguistics, and it covers linguistic areas from four continents. Some of these concern a well-established linguistic area, such as the Balkan, others document regions which have never been studied in an areal perspective before, such as East Nusantara and the Guaporé-Mamoré region (involving parts of lowland Bolivia and the adjacent Brazilian state of Rondonia), yet others involve areas which have been the subject of debate and recent scrutiny, such as the Caucasus and South-East Asia. All studies present cultural and historical background, as well as detailed information. However, they differ in their scope and linguistic theoretical framework, although they all stress the significance of language contact factors in process of change.

In an extensive survey, Slava Chirikba convincingly shows that there is good reason to accept the reality of a Sprachbund in the **Caucasus**, basing himself on a host of little known materials, as well as on his own field research. Chirikba lists a whole range of features, phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and lexical which are shared by the Kartvelian and North Caucasian language groups, and as such are characteristic of the Caucasus as a whole. Chirikba also discusses in considerable detail processes of historical intermingling etc. that produced this result.

Similarly, Marian Klamer, Ger Reesink, Mirjam van Staden present the historical and the linguistic evidence for **East Nusantara** (the archipelagoes of eastern Indonesia and the adjacent regions of Papua) as a linguistic area. In this area Austronesian languages and Papuan languages have influenced each other. Five features are focused upon: possessor-possesum order in adnominal possession, the overt marking of the distinction alienable vs. inalienable possession, and clause-final negation have diffused into the Austronesian languages from the Papuan languages, while two features have gone the other way: SVO as primary constituent order, and an inclusive/exclusive opposition in the pronominal paradigm.

With respect to the Amazonian state of Rondonia in Brazil and the adjacent lowland areas of Bolivia, Mily Crevels and Hein van der Voort explore the possibility that what they term the **Guaporé-Mamoré** region be considered a linguistic area, citing both ethno-historical and archeological evidence and data from recent research by themselves and members of their research group. Among the linguistic features explored we find various types of classifiers, as well as a high incidence of prefixes, the use of evidentials and directionals, occurrence of verbal number but not so much of nominal number, and the inclusive/exclusive distinction.

Using a more theoretical generative approach, Olga Mišeska Tomić explores areas of local convergence in the **Balkan Sprachbund**, predominantly on the basis of morpho-syntactic features. These include various nominal and pronominal case markings, the pronominal clitic system (clitic doubling, possessive clitics, impersonal clitics), the verbal perfect, and evidentials. In addition to the data in the vast research literature, Tomić adduces evidence from her own fieldwork. Not just the standard varieties of the Balkan languages are taken into account, but a host of individual local varieties.

Finally, Rint Sybesma explores the syntactic and semantic properties of a single feature, postverbal ‘can’ in four languages from **South East Asia**: Zhuang, Cantonese, Vietnamese and Lao. Zhuang is argued to show some Sinitic characteristics, even though it is a Tai language. This is an areal feature shared by languages spoken in Indo-China and Southern China; the modal element occurs in a for these languages a-typical, post-verbal position, which is further evidence of its contact-induced occurrence.

Thus these five studies illustrate different approaches to the concept of linguistic area. The insight has been rapidly gaining ground that languages owe many of their characteristics to the languages with which they have been in contact over time, languages either related to them or not. Yet the nature of influences and the way these areal influences took hold remains a matter of debate. To cite Sally Thomason, “. . . what we understand about linguistic areas is depressingly meager, compared to what we don’t understand about them” (Thomason 2001: 99). Furthermore, areas are often hard to define. Hence the title of this book, which reflects a shift in emphasis from linguistic areas as concrete, well circumscribed and relatively unique entities, to a way of doing linguistics in an areal perspective. Researchers such as Stolz (2002) have called for an absolute cessation of research on Sprachbund phenomena; while his methodological observations on how difficult it is to define an area certainly make sense, I do not take this as a call to stop doing linguistic research from an areal perspective.

New findings in this book include the observation that there may be many more language areas than previously been recognized, leading to a more general ‘areal’ perspective on comparative and descriptive linguistics. Inevitably, this will lead to a new series of methodological issues, e.g., involving the sampling of both languages and features, and methods for establishing the significance of findings. Also, there is

the need for increased awareness of new technique for data storage and comparison, relying on typological databases and map representation of features and items.

It is also clear that comparative research is needed, now that new ‘linguistic areas’ are being discovered in different parts of the world, involving different language types and different contact situations. This comparative approach will lead to a new typology of linguistic areas. In addition to the “core area / peripheral area” model implicit in many descriptions, there will be attention for chains of overlapping areas, diaspora communities as linguistic areas, clusters of immigrant languages in a migration setting as linguistic areas, etc. What to do with the white holes in an area, i.e., the non-converging languages? What is the role of size: should we distinguish micro / meso / macro linguistic areas? I return to some of these questions below.

Chirikba’s paper contains an excellent historical overview of the history of the notion of linguistic area or Sprachbund. The amount of attention paid to areal approaches in comparative linguistics is considerable and still growing, particularly at the descriptive level. This book is a further example of this trend, and presents, as stated, five detailed case studies of linguistic areas. We can only gain understanding of linguistic areas through two approaches: further detailed examination of specific linguistic areas to discover their properties, on the one hand, and reflection upon scenarios for their genesis and upon ways of identifying linguistic areas and studying them, one the other.

Complementing the case studies, this introduction will primarily take the second approach, that of theoretical reflection. It contains four main parts. In section 2 I dissect the definition of linguistic area provided by Thomason, as a way of tackling some conceptual and methodological issues. Section 3 contains a discussion of some of the scenarios that might be invoked in explaining the emergence of linguistic areas. This is illustrated where possible with a large linguistic area, the Atlantic, to illustrate some of the issues we are faced with in section 4, where I also draw some conclusions from the earlier discussion and relates it to the perspective taken in the five case studies presented in this book.

2. A definition and its dimensions

Thomason (2001: 99) defines a linguistic area or, alternatively Sprachbund (Trubetzkoy 1928), as “. . . a geographical region containing a group of three or more languages that share some structural features as a result of contact rather than as a result of accident or inheritance from a common ancestor.” This definition contains six key concepts, which may serve to illuminate the problems at hand.

- a. Geographical region
- b. Three or more languages
- c. Shared structural features
- d. Contact

- e. Not accident
- f. Not inheritance

In the following subsections I will discuss each of these concepts in turn.

2.1 Geographical region

The notion of geographical region would seem uncontroversial, but actually is somewhat complex, for various reasons. First of all, because in geography, and consequently in fields like dialect geography there has been an evolution from space to spatiality (Britain 2002: 604). In the changing conceptions of spatiality (Britain 2002: 606 sq. citing Massey 1984, 1985), before 1960: space was viewed as region (with the key words: place, difference, distinctiveness), but due to the quantitative revolution in the social sciences in the 1960s: the notion of space exploded. Euclidean space gave way to social space (defined in terms of network links), and social space in turn was redefined as perceived space (social distance). For the study of linguistic areas this view of space has the implication that geographical contiguity is not the crucial notion, but rather communicative networks, affinities, and social ties. Adjacent languages need not influence one another profoundly; in contrast, language influence may involve communities geographically distant but linked by terrestrial or maritime trade or migration. In the final part of this introduction I illustrate such a non-contiguous linguistic area.

Second, there is the issue of *scale*. In current typological work very large areas are postulated, on the basis of the distribution of typological features. An area of this type might be Eurasia, or the circum-Pacific region, as in Johanna Nichols' (1992) work. Yet, the scenario for the emergence of these areas is hard to link to current work in language contact studies, which involve much smaller areas in which concretely identifiable speech communities exist, as in Gumperz and Wilson's classic (1971) study of convergence in an Indian speech community, or Aikhenvald's (2002) study of the Vaupés River region in Amazonia. In between these very large areas as in linguistic typology and the small areas that are the subject of the language contact literature we find the middle sized areas of historical linguistics, such as the Balkan or Ethiopia. On an abstract level, these are all areas, but from the perspective of concrete research, they are quite distinct. It is clear that the smaller the scale of the postulated area, the easier it is to apply what Campbell (1985) has dubbed the historicist approach, which involves the actual documentation of what influences there were, and in which direction. For large areas, the 'circumstantialist' approach, which simply catalogues similarities between languages, is probably the maximum attainable. In Table 1 I present the differences between the approaches schematically.

2.2 Three or more languages

The requirement that three or more languages be involved in a linguistic area is a practical one for Thomason: with just two languages any old language pair which has

Table 1. Levels of scale in the analysis of linguistic areas

Level	Space	Time	Sources	Scenarios
<i>Micro</i>	Bilingual community	20–200 years	Fieldwork data	Specific contact scenarios
<i>Meso</i>	Geographical region	Generally 200–1000 years	Comparative data; historical sources	Global contact scenarios
<i>Macro</i>	Larger areas of the world	Deep time	Typological, genetic, archeological data	Vague or no contact scenarios

converged would be treated as a linguistic area. This is a sensible restriction, of course, but it does raise a complicated issue, namely that of exclusiveness: how special are linguistic areas? In the original perception of researchers, linguistic areas are somewhat exceptional: we find them here and there on the globe, but their number is in the tens rather than hundreds. However, this perception also differs from sub-discipline to sub-discipline and from continent to continent.

For North America, there is a long tradition of areal comparisons, dating back to Boas (1911) and Kroeber (1939), and with links to anthropological studies about cultural diffusion. More recent scholars working on linguistic areas here include Mary Haas and Joel Sherzer. Originally, little distinction was made between genetic and diffusionist perspectives on areal resemblances, but later this changed, and more recently the issue of cultural diffusion and culture areas triggered a considerable interest in areal approaches. This is evidenced in the large number of areas distinguished in North America, following the earlier tradition of culture areas. The same thing cannot be said for Central and South America, although in the 1970s Mesoamerica was identified as a linguistic area. For the Old World, the attention paid to areal phenomena differs widely from region to region. In Table 2 an overview is given of a number of linguistic areas in the world that have been identified or postulated.

It is clear that on the one hand, a large variety of different regions has been identified, but on the other hand, the areas covered do not involve the whole globe. Further studies are continuously appearing.

2.3 Shared structural features

Given the ease with which words are borrowed, there is widespread agreement that linguistic areas based on shared vocabulary would not be interesting. This conclusion is entirely reasonable but it leads to a paradox. Languages in linguistic areas are assumed to have distinct lexicons, but shared grammatical features. Yet there are implicational borrowing hierarchies such as the in (1).

- (1) Words < Sounds < Grammar patterns < Word order < Meaning distinctions

Table 2. Selective overview of reported linguistic areas

Region	Source
<i>The Americas</i> (based on Campbell 1997a).	
Northern Northwest Coast	Leer 1991
Northwest Coast	e.g., Sherzer 1973
Plateau	e.g., Sherzer 1973
Northern California	Haas 1976
Clear Lake	Callaghan 1964
South Coast Range	Hinton 1991
Southern California/Western Arizona	Hinton 1991
Great Basin	Sherzer 1973, 1976
Pueblo	Bereznak 1995
Plains	Sherzer 1973
Northeast	Sherzer 1976
Southeast	Haas 1969
Mesoamerica	Kaufmann 1973
Colombia/Central America	Constenla 1991
Vaupés	Aikhenvald 2002
Guaporé/Mamoré	Crevels/van der Voort (this volume)
Southern Cone	Klein 1992
Venezuelan/Antillean	Constenla 1991
Ecuadorian-Colombian	Constenla 1991
Amazon	Derbyshire 1987
Lowland South America	Doris Payne 1990a, David Payne 1990
<i>Eurasia and Pacific</i>	
Balkan	Trubetzkoy 1928
Baltic	Koptjevskaja-Tamm and Wälchli 2001
Caucasus	Chirikba (this volume)
Mediterranean	Ammann (in prep.)
Europe	Haspelmath 1998, 2001
Ethiopian highlands	Leslau 1945; Tosco 2000
Benin/Surinam	Muysken and Smith (in prep.)
South Asia	Masica 1976; Emeneau 1980
South China/Indochina	Enfield (2003), Sybesma (this volume)
East Indonesia/Papua	Klamer, Reesink, van Staden (this volume)
Sepik River basin	Foley 1986

Grammatical features are much harder to borrow than lexical elements, and among lexical elements there are various types of hierarchies as well. This can be expressed in terms of the the *embeddedness* paradox, which holds that the more embedded a linguistic feature, the more significant is its spread. At the same time, the more embedded a linguistic feature, the less likely it is borrowed. This paradox

is formulated by Campbell (1997b: 51) as follows: ‘The more internally motivated the universal or typological pattern, the less likely it is that areal diffusion will be permitted to introduce departures from the expected principled arrangements of elements in a language.’

Related to this is what might be called the *regularity* paradox, namely that language contact phenomena are rule-governed. Yet the results of contact in areal linguistics may appear haphazard. Thus regarding certain rare word order types (Greenberg 1966: 7, 18, 19, 20) Campbell (1997b: 51) remarks: ‘Most (perhaps all) languages representing these types owe significant aspects of their word order patterns to borrowing from other languages.’

Methodologically, the embeddedness and regularity paradoxes lead us to the following dilemma. To establish a certain linguistic area we may take either route (2a) or route (2b):

- (2) a. *Top-down*
 Establish a universal check list of key typological features and calculate the distance between the languages in an area in terms of their values for these features;
- b. *Bottom-up*
 Establish one-to-one correspondences of very specific features between individual languages and then generalize the resulting list to all languages in the area.

The advantage of method (2a) is less bias, and the possibility of establishing significance across linguistic areas: which languages show a clustering of properties? The disadvantage of this might be that there is interference from typological patterning. What could be areal may alternatively be the result of typological pressures (cf. also Campbell 1998).

The advantage of (2b) is that it relies on specific borrowed features, in many cases an ad hoc unorganized list, with probably less interference from typological pattern pressure. The disadvantage would be that there is no guarantee that the feature set chosen is representative for language patterns in general. Another feature set might yield an entirely different, half overlapping linguistic area.

2.4 Contact

The next issue is the precise notion of contact we need to invoke in accounting for linguistic areas. This will be the topic of the next section, but a few preliminary remarks are in order here.

A first question is, how important is the degree of bilingualism? Obviously, very slight bilingual contacts would not suffice to bring about any relevant changes. However, by no means all cases of linguistic areas documented show evidence of intimate and

widespread community-level bilingual language use in everyday settings. Some of the situations, such as the Circum-Baltic linguistic area, showed extensive commercial contacts etc., but no large scale population movements. Possibly, prestige plays an important role here as well.

A second question would be: how important is time depth? Again, no hard and fast rules can be given. We know from the genesis of creoles that in the right circumstances linguistic change can be extremely rapid, e.g., 50 years in the case of the Surinam creoles. On the other hand, some of the putative linguistic areas may have taken thousands of years to form.

Of course we would like to have non-circular historical research results confirming that there was contact, possibly with written sources for the languages involved in the pre-contact period. Sometimes there is archaeological evidence for the contact, only reliable when the remains can be directly linked to specific language groups. Finally, the geographical distribution of language families may be a secondary source of evidence for language contact.

2.5 Not accident

It is immediately obvious that we would not want the similarities between the languages involved to be accidental. Nobody will claim areal influence if the similarity between two languages is limited to the vowel [a] and the category plural. It is more interesting if two adjacent unrelated languages share the category trialis and the rounded front vowel [ü]. Convincing claims of areal influence involve a number of highly specific and unusual shared features. However, this immediately leads to the *markedness* paradox: The more marked a shared feature, the more likely it is due to contact, but at the same time the more marked a shared feature, the less likely it is borrowed. Marked features do not transfer as easily as unmarked features.

A special role is reserved here for discourse properties. Are these completely separate from grammatical properties or is their dynamism the result of conversational and intonational salience?

2.6 Not inheritance from a common source

This seemingly speaks for itself, since the very idea of a linguistic area involves to some extent unrelated language varieties. Paradoxically, however, as pointed out by Dahl (2001), many cases of areal spread involve closely related languages, most strikingly of course dialects, where we find that non-coinciding isoglosses are the rule rather than the exception. This often makes it difficult to establish whether a feature has been inherited or not. Suppose we have three related languages A, B, and C sharing a feature X. Then it is easily possible that the feature spread from A to B and C (after entering A from an unrelated language Q), rather than being inherited from the ancestor to A, B,

and C. This can not be decided on the basis of the distribution of the feature in A, B, and C by itself.

3. Contact scenarios

Having surveyed the definition of a linguistic area in some detail, I now turn to the possible contact scenarios that could potentially be responsible for the genesis of such an area. How can we explain the many typological similarities between the languages in a large area? For this, it is important to establish a typology of more or less understood contact phenomena. In the context of this paper, I can only mention these briefly, referring to the vast amount of literature in this area, most recently Winford (2003). Invoking known scenarios to understand historical contact developments is in line with the uniformitarian methodological principle that changes in the past must be understandable in terms of changes that have been observed more recently or that are currently taking place. The following contact scenarios can be distinguished. There is some overlap between them, but there is sufficient ground to keep them apart. In each case, a proto-typical example will be given.

Borrowing. As has been the case in English with French words after the Norman invasion, languages may borrow massive amounts of vocabulary from one another, without concomitant grammatical changes. In the wake of lexical borrowing, there is often the borrowing of a set of derivational affixes and lexically based word order restrictions, but often no other more fundamental grammatical changes. Distinguishing features of borrowing are:

- (3) a. It is frequent;
- b. It is generally asymmetrical: from dominant superstrate to a socially subordinate language;
- c. It involves relatively concrete features, generally 'fabric' (audible word forms, rather than patterns);
- d. It generally follows borrowability hierarchies.

Borrowing could lead to a linguistic area if there had been a shared superstrate language. Thus a group of South American languages could all separately have borrowed features from Spanish. Alternatively, there could have been chain borrowing (as we find in the spread of Quechua numerals among various languages of southern Latin America). Finally, there could have been one prestigious model language from which features spread in various directions. In all cases, however, a borrowing scenario would be best to explain the areal spread of 'surface' features such words, sounds, and possibly word order.

Grammatical convergence under prolonged stable bilingualism. Cases have been reported of communities where bilingual speakers have let their languages converge

over the generations. The most famous case is the also somewhat controversial paper by Gumperz and Wilson (1971). It is easy to imagine this, but we know little of the actual mechanisms involved. Distinguishing features of this kind of convergence are:

- (4) a. It may be relatively frequent, though not as frequent as borrowing by far;
- b. It is potentially symmetrical;
- c. It may lead to surface convergence, e.g., in semantic categories and in word order.

The precise linguistic effects of this type of convergence are as yet unknown.

Some researchers have claimed a link between convergence and code-switching. An example is Hudson (1996: 44), who writes: 'Features presumably spread across language boundaries as the result of bilingualism, and the preference of syntactic features among areal features may be due to a tendency among bilingual individuals to mix languages in mid-sentence. The more similar the sentence-structures are in the two languages, the easier this is; so language-mixing may encourage the suppression of syntactic differences. The areal diffusion of syntactic features is otherwise hard to understand, since syntax generally seems relatively impervious to historical change.' However, it is not known whether typical areal features correspond to frequent switching sites.

Shift and substrate formation. Speakers who have massively shifted to a socially dominant language may have retained patterns from their own native languages in the newly acquired second language. If these remain in the resulting new variety once the original native languages have disappeared, we speak of substrate phenomena. A typical situation would be substrate languages like Basque and Celtic that have influenced the course of development of Vulgar Latin in southwestern Europe, resulting in the Romance languages. Potentially distinguishing features of shift-induced language change are:

- (5) a. It is frequent;
- b. It is asymmetrical: from a subordinate language to a socially dominant language;
- c. It involves relatively abstract language features.

Areal phenomena that appeal to shift-induced change would most likely propose a shared substrate. The result would be shared 'deep' features, such as meaning distinctions, and patterns of grammatical organization.

Relexification and intertwining. Bilingual speakers have been reported to massively replace the vocabulary of their native languages with that of another language, while retaining most of the morpho-syntax, phonology and morphology of their original language. This process has been termed relexification. An example is Media Lengua, as reported in Muysken (1981; 1997), where speakers of Ecuadorian Quechua relexified their Quechua with Spanish words. The more general term intertwining has been used particularly by Bakker (1997), and leaves open the possibility that the traditional language provides the lexicon rather than the grammar. Relevant features are:

- (6) a. It is highly infrequent in its stable forms;
- b. It is often asymmetrical, in that the grammar of the original community language is retained;

- c. It results in a division of labour between the lexicon of language A and the grammar of language B.

To assume that a linguistic area has emerged from intertwining would be rather far-fetched, given the rarity of the process and its specific outcome.

Pidgin and creole genesis. A number of pidgins have emerged in different parts of the world, more or less stable non-native languages used in occasional communication between different groups. Creole languages have emerged in situations of intense contact with highly unequal social relations and limited presence of the dominant language, such as plantation slavery. These generally derive most of their lexicon from the dominant language, often a European colonial language, and their structures are the result of the interaction between substrate and superstrate languages, also showing the result of universal developments and simplification of inflectional morphology. Sometimes a creole has resulted from an earlier pidgin.

Linguistic levelling. In periods of population movements and increased communication between hitherto separate populations, intense dialect contact may lead to linguistic levelling: morphological simplification and compromise phonological traits. To the extent that leveling leads to greater similarities, conjoint displacement of languages might contribute to the overall end-result of a linguistic area, which in this case would be characterized by the dominance of unmarked features.

4. The Atlantic as a linguistic area

Having briefly surveyed a number of language contact processes, as an example of the approaches one could take to tackle the problem of very large linguistic scale, I want to explore the many complex relations of mutual influence that have characterized the languages bordering on the Atlantic, which for this reason may be termed a linguistic area. As such, it takes its inspiration from the massive work by the Bremen social historian Dirk Hoerder on migrations in the second millennium (2002). However, where Hoerder takes a global perspective, I focus on the Atlantic, one of the key arenas of such migrations. Furthermore, this is an exploratory overview outlining some of the basic trends rather than the detailed treatment that the topic at hand undoubtedly deserves, but which would take an entire book. Historical linguists may scoff at looking at the Atlantic as a linguistic area since it surely has only a limited time depth, and as such could be considered more the product of global processes of globalization than of a linguistic area in the traditional sense. However, the processes involved in the linguistic development of the Atlantic region cannot be seen as really distinct in principle from what has happened before in other parts of the world.

Given the complexities of the interactions and influences involved, the Atlantic should be seen as a contact superposition zone (Koptjevskaja-Tamm and Wälchli 2001), both multiplex in time, in the sense that it has been the backdrop to different interactions over a large time span, and multiplex in space, in that it consists of a

number of sub-networks. The purpose of this section is then to briefly look at a large and diverse set of in themselves familiar phenomena from a single perspective, and moreover, a perspective that has met with some success in other parts of the world and in other branches of linguistics (Aikhenvald and Dixon 2001, Matras et al. 2006). The wider and novel perspective may help us uncover larger regularities not apparent at first sight, and help come to grips with the scale problem mentioned.

A further reason to take the Atlantic region as a point of departure is that it is a recent linguistic area; intensive links across the Ocean were only established after the European invasions in the wake of Columbus' voyages into the Caribbean. Many traditional treatments of linguistic areas take the era of European colonial expansion as the end point, the breaking off point of their analysis. For this reason, I cannot use data bases such as those in the *World Atlas of Linguistic Structures* (Haspelmath et al. 2005), which largely rely on the pre-expansion situation, as our point of reference either.

In discussing the Atlantic as a linguistic area, I have chosen for convenience sake the different continents rather than the relevant time periods as the organizational principle for my exposition, and will start with Europe, before turning to Africa, the Caribbean, and South and North America. The reason is that European nautical activities and, subsequently, the slave trade and the colonial expansion, were the motor behind many of the developments which led to the Atlantic linguistic area. In contrast with most treatments, my focus in this section will be on contact processes rather than linguistic outcomes, given the preliminary nature of this exploration.

In Table 3 some of the developments in the European context are summarized which have lead to increased contact:

Table 3. Developments in Europe that have led to increased contact

Process and region	Period	Resulting areal phenomenon
Migrations in the post-Roman era throughout Europe	From pre-history	Gradual convergence
Trading in the Mediterranean	Since Roman empire	Lingua francas, gradual convergence
Basque whale hunting in the North Atlantic		Pidgin, spread of vocabulary
North Atlantic trade in arctic regions	Since 1000	Pidgin, spread of vocabulary
Baltic	Since 1000	Gradual convergence through trade
Most of Europe	Since the Roman Empire until the present	Superstrate influence (borrowing and calquing) from (successively) from Latin, French, and English
Western Europe	Since 1000	Convergence through Norman conquest of Britain

The results of early patterns of convergence between the languages of **Europe** have been well documented in the enormous Eurotype typology project. This project has unveiled a number of structural parallels or similarities between the languages of Europe, only some of which can be attributed to common genetic roots (Haspelmath 1998; 2001). These similarities have emerged in millennia long processes of convergence and parallel development.

Haspelmath (2001) presents the following list of core grammatical features of what he terms Standard Average European:

- a distinction between definite and indefinite articles (*the woman/a woman*)
- relative clauses formed with relative pronouns (*the woman who came*)
- a 'have' perfect construction (*I have just eaten.*)
- nominative experiencers (*I think, I feel*)
- participial passives (*he was beaten*)
- anti-causative prominence (*change* [tr.] > *change* [intr.], not *change* [intr.] > *change-cause* [tr.])
- dative external possessives (*Die Mutter wäscht dem Kind die Haare.* (lit.) 'The mother washes the(dative) child the hair.)
- negative pronouns and lack of verbal negation (*I saw nobody.*)
- particles in comparative constructions (*taller than Jack*)
- relative-based equative constructions (*so Z wie X* (German), *tan Z com X* (Catalan) 'so Z as X')
- subject person affixes as strict agreement markers (*nous mangeons / wir essen*)
- distinction between the intensifier and the reflexive (*self* versus *himself*)

Haspelmath presents five possible explanations for the emergence of these common traits, and discards all but one of these:

1. Shared Proto-Indo-European features. This explanation is flawed because many of the features listed were not part of Proto-Indo-European, as far as we know.
2. A common substrate. This explanation is flawed for a similar reason; some of the features emerged later, as far as we know, at a time when a possible substrate would have been long gone.
3. The role of Latin as a lingua franca since the time of the Roman conquests. This explanation suffers from the fact that many of the common features are not part of Latin.
4. A common pan-European culture since the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Many of the changes are too deeply embedded in the grammatical structures of the languages involved to have arisen in a relatively short period.
5. The great political transformations and migrations that characterized the transition from the Roman Empire to the early medieval period. This explanation has most possibilities, in Haspelmath's view, but it is rather unspecific.

It could well be that the shared patterns are due to a chain of events, and that we should conceive of a number of interlocking networks. After the Middle Ages, a number of developments are worthy of note.

In southern Europe, Mediterranean contact vernaculars have played an important role. A number of languages have been used in the Mediterranean in the period of trade at least since the Alexandrian period), when Koine Greek was spoken in the eastern and central Mediterranean. Greek was later replaced in part by Latin, and in the medieval period Italian dialects and the Romance-based contact vernacular *Lingua Franca* played an important role. Other languages of wider communication in the Mediterranean included Catalan, Italian, and Arabic. Thus the Mediterranean can be viewed as an important contact area (Ramat and Stolz 2002; Ammann, in prep.).

In northern Europe, the Hanseatic League, a federation of trading guilds mostly active in the Baltic and North Seas, played an important role in linking merchants in a large number of cities. The League was active from the 13th until the 17th centuries, and was centered around Lübeck and later on Dantzig. Since Low German speaking merchants settled in a number of towns, there was convergence and some levelling, with Low German as a point of reference (Koptjevskaja-Tamm and Wälchli 2001).

Dating from the period immediately preceding the European colonial expansion are the Atlantic whaling pidgins and nautical languages. Bakker (1987) describes an Icelandic pidgin with a Basque lexical base and other traces of Basque presence. The Basque have explored the waters of the northern Atlantic while whale-hunting from the 15th century onward. This has led to the creation of a Basque-Icelandic nautical pidgin (Bakker 1987) and to the presence of numerous Basque loans in coastal North-Atlantic Amerindian languages (Bakker 1989). A later pidgin is *Russenorsk*, which developed along the North Cape of Scandinavia from contacts between Norwegian and Russian (Jahr and Broch 1996).

Throughout the Middle Ages, Latin played an important role in unifying large parts of western Europe, but in the Renaissance and Reformation Latin was eventually replaced by the vernaculars, but particularly in learned vocabulary and phrases there was extensive calquing as well as direct borrowing. In the 18th century, French took over the role of Latin, again with extensive calquing and direct borrowing, and since World War II English has been acquiring the same role. In Central Europe, the Habsburg Empire played an important role in spreading German over a large region, as far as the northern Balkan. This influence affected several Slavic languages, as well as Hungarian. The effects of these developments is currently still being investigated.

We do not know what the effect was of historical developments in the pre-colonial period in Africa, but it is clear that there may have been considerable convergence. Greenberg (1983) lists the following common pan-African linguistic features:

- implosives
- doubly articulated labial-velar stops like /kp/ and /gb/
- initial nasal consonant clusters;
- clicks

- the lower high (or ‘near close’) vowels /u/ and /ɪ/
- tone contrasts
- the common use of adjectival verbs
- the expression of comparison by means of a verb *to surpass*

While many of these features do occur in Atlantic Africa, they completely characterize neither Africa as a whole nor specifically the Atlantic coast.

Güldemann (2007a; cf also Güldemann 2007b) argues that there is a large linguistic area spreading across Sub-Saharan Africa from the Sudan to the Atlantic, but this area is crucially not relevant to the concerns of this article since the core of the area is located in central sub-Saharan Africa. Benue-Congo / Chadic contacts in Nigeria have been documented e.g., by Ballard (1971) and Gerhardt and Wolff (1977), while Creissels et al. (2007) discuss general morphosyntactic properties of African languages.

According to Güldemann (2007b), there were five linguistic macro-areas before the era of recent large-scale colonization:

- I The Berber spread zone
- II Chad-Ethiopia
- III The already mentioned Macro-Sudan belt
- IV The Bantu spread zone
- V The Kalahari basin

All these areas predominantly have an east-west rather than a south-north extension, due to the fact that spread involved climatically and ecologically similar environments. Thus there was no ‘Atlantic’ area in Africa; rather the coast was split up across four major areas (all but macro-area II on the list in Güldemann 2007a). Another point stressed is that these areas may not be due to a single historical process. Note that Güldemann limits his discussion to the pre-colonial period. In Table 4 a brief overview of some of the processes that have led to greater convergence in Atlantic Africa is presented.

Table 4. Developments in Africa that have led to increased contact

Process and region	Period	Resulting areal phenomenon
Creation of Sudanic and Guinea kingdoms due to early contacts with Muslim Berber and Arab groups	8th–14th centuries	Increased trading across the Sahara and from the Sudanic belt to the coast
Spread of European vernaculars as part of the colonization efforts on the coast	16th–19th centuries	Increasing spread of European vocabulary in the coastal languages
Slave raids, leading to demographic upheaval	15th–19th centuries	Increasing use of African <i>linguae francae</i>

(Continued)

Table 4. Continued

Process and region	Period	Resulting areal phenomenon
(particularly in the southern part of Africa) and demographic restructuring		
Creation of European colonies and creation of spheres of influence	16th–20th centuries	Spread of European national languages
Urbanization	19th–20th century	Creation of urban contact vernaculars and spread of <i>linguae francae</i> . Expanded use of varieties based on European languages

Probably the numerous *linguae francae* spoken in the regions along the West African coast have contributed considerably to the linguistic convergence in that part of Africa. Wolf (2000: 324–330) lists the following, in the region south of the sphere of Arabic influence, and going from north to south along the coast: Wolof, Bambara (slightly further inland), Dyula, Akan, Hausa (again slightly further inland), Yoruba, Fulfulde, Lingala, Kituba, and Umbundu.

The role of African *linguae francae* became more and more important due to European contact and during the slave trade, particularly in West Africa. The role of diffused European lexifier pidgins in the period of the slave trade also remains to be studied. Along the African coast a number of European-lexifier pidgins were in use, starting with a Portuguese-lexicon pidgin, and ending up with an English-lexifier pidgin.

The colonial period, slavery, and the European linguistic presence in Africa have had a profound impact. A number of European colonial languages have developed local African varieties, which show substrate influence, evidence of levelling and simplification, and lexical borrowing. West African French is spoken as an elite language alongside of West African languages in the former French colonies, including Ivory Coast, and French Cameroon. West African English is a variety which cannot be strictly separated, although it is distinct, from West African Pidgin English. African Portuguese is spoken in Angola and Mozambique as a second language, and *de facto* functions as a *lingua franca* and official language in these countries. Finally, the position of Afrikaans, related to Dutch, is complex. It is of course the native language of a part of the South African white population, but also of part of the so-called coloured population of the western Cape province. South African English similarly is both the heritage language of settlers of British origin, and now the adopted native of European and Asian immigrants.

As to the **Caribbean** and **North and South America**, a number of historical developments are relevant, centered around the European invasions in the 16th and 17th centuries. I will first focus on the Caribbean, and then turn to the rest of the new World, keeping in mind that many of the developments are characteristic of the whole region. In Table 5 an overview of some of the major developments is given.

Table 5. Developments in Caribbean and North and South America that have led to increased contact

Process and region	Period	Resulting areal phenomenon
Early contacts with Carib and Arawak populations in the Caribbean	16th century	Spread of lexical loans from a number of Amerindian languages
Coastal settlements of the Portuguese in Brazil, followed by successive exploration of the interior	15th–18th centuries	Formation of <i>Língua Geral</i> on the basis of leveled Tupi varieties with Portuguese influence.
Spread of European vernaculars as part of the colonization efforts	16th–19th centuries	Linguistic leveling and selective spread of European dialectal and nautical features
Importation of African slaves	16th–19th centuries	Transfer of West African syntactic and semantic features to the New World. Spread of African lexical items.
Transports of slaves from one colony to another	17th–19th centuries	Mutual influence between individual creole languages, both lexically and structurally
Substitutions of colonial lexifier languages	17th–20th centuries	Mutual influence between individual creole languages, both lexically and structurally
Superstrate influence on the dominated Amerindian languages	16th–20th centuries	Spread of loanwords from European languages, structural assimilation
Labor migration in the post-slavery setting between plantation societies	19th–20th centuries	Diffusion of a number of immigrant languages
Importation of contract laborers from South Asia	19th century	Spread of Bhojpuri and Hindi
Migration to the New World from a number of countries in Europe and Asia	19th–20th centuries	Diffusion of leveled varieties of a number of languages
Urbanization	19th–20th century	Further leveling of different varieties

Historical developments in the Caribbean in the pre-colonial period are not directly relevant to the later contact situation since the Amerindian populations were mostly wiped out by diseases and overexploitation, or integrated into the surrounding communities. More directly relevant is the linguistic impact of slavery in the New World, which brought speakers of a number of West African languages to the newly founded plantation colonies. There are many instances of areal feature distributions due to this, e.g., the work by Michaelis and Haspelmath (2003) on double object constructions, and the work reported on in Muysken (in prep.) and Migge and Smith (2007) on the link between Benin and Surinam.

It should also be mentioned that there were many cases of transports of slaves from one plantation colony to another. This includes: from Brazil to Cayenne, Surinam, Curaçao (Goodman 1985); from St. Eustatius to St. Thomas (Goodman (1987); from Curaçao to St. Thomas (Hesseling 1933). These slave transports contributed to the spread of features among the different creoles. Thus we find a few properties of Papiamentu in Negerhollands, and more generally, the spread of Portuguese lexemes and some Portuguese creole structural features elsewhere in the Caribbean.

Another factor contributing to greater homogeneity among the languages of the Caribbean concerns substitutions of colonial lexifier languages due to changes in the colonial power dominating a particular island, given the turbulent history of the region. In a number of cases, one colonial language replaced another in the course of colonial domination, due to political changes but also shifting migration patterns. In the Virgin Islands Dutch settlers were influential in contributing lexicon to the newly emerging creole, Negerhollands (even though islands were under Danish rule), while later English became the dominant language. Similar developments characterize St. Lucia, Surinam, the Dutch Antilles, the Berbice river in Guyana, Belize, etc. Although not as turbulent as the earlier times, in the post-slavery period there were also transports and movements of creole speakers from one area to another, as in the movements from Haiti and Curaçao to Cuba (Lipski 1994), from the Anglo-Caribbean to Aruba, from the Caribbean to West-Africa. Haitians have moved to French Guyana and elsewhere.

With regard to **North and South America** the dominant developments, to be sure, were, as in the case of the Caribbean, the importation of African slaves and the migration of Europeans to the New World. The historical developments in the pre-colonial period are perhaps less relevant in this respect because there is no evidence of large scale convergence between the Amerindian languages in the relevant period.

There is, to be sure, the diffusion of early Amerindian borrowings, Words from a number of Amerindian languages, notably Arawak, Carib, Chibcha, Quechua, and Guaraní, have rapidly diffused after early colonization, to a number of European languages, and from them, to yet other languages. Of course, the Amerindian languages, the languages along the Atlantic coast in both North and South America have been profoundly affected. The majority of the coastal languages has died out as their speakers were pushed inland or were killed by the European invaders.

Turning to the migration of Europeans to the New World, one of the most momentous consequences of trans-Atlantic contact, and ultimately in terms of numbers of speakers the most important one, is the spread of a number of European languages to the New World. New varieties have emerged of a number of languages, and there has been the important phenomenon of selection and levelling that Foster (1960) has analyzed for the cultural domain. While Dutch was spoken for some time in settler communities in North America, it now survives only in Surinam, where it is the official language and lingua franca, and in the Netherlands Antilles, where it is the language of government, though not used by many people in ordinary life. Caribbean and North American English is extremely varied and wide-spread, and today constitutes one of

the most influential language varieties in the world. French is spoken in a number of places in the Caribbean and North America, most importantly in Quebec, of course. Brazilian Portuguese is now the most important type of Portuguese, and is developing on its own and away from older European norms. Caribbean and Latin American Spanish are the most frequently spoken, if not most prestigious (a role most often reserved for peninsular Spanish) varieties in the world.

Other languages are now less widely spoken. Yiddish survives mostly in large cities in North America and Argentina, such as Montreal, New York, and Buenos Aires. In parts of Argentina, notably in pockets of Welsh settlers in the Lower Chubut Valley in Patagonia, some Welsh is still spoken. The first Welsh settlement in southern Argentina in 1863 was on the Atlantic coastline. I know of no studies specifically of Argentinian Welsh. Finally, we should mention the language of the Mennonite communities in various parts of South America, particularly in Bolivia and Paraguay. Over 30,000 members of various Mennonite congregations speak varieties of both Low and High German; there has been some dialect levelling in the course of time.

An interesting aspect concerns the African language survivals and African language borrowings. In all European colonial languages, as well as in the Caribbean creoles, in the New World words from African languages have survived (Mufwene 1993).

A third very significant development is the diffusion of South Asian koines (Bhojpuri etc.) (Barz and Siegel 1988), Chinese, and Arabic, in the Caribbean and South Africa. After the abolishment of slavery, recruitment started of contract labourers from Asia, notably North India and China, and to some extent also Java in Surinam. This led to the development of new varieties of these languages, which often underwent levelling and simplification.

Very important on both sides of the Atlantic is urbanization and large-scale migration of rural populations, a further homogenizing factor we should take into account. All along the coasts of the Atlantic, the creation of urban conglomerations has led to more uniform dialects.

As can be seen, the historical processes listed for the Atlantic region had important sociolinguistic results. These may be summarized under a number of rubrics, which include the spread of African structural features and selected lexical items to the New World, the levelling of European dialect traits in the exported varieties of the European languages, processes of morphological reduction and creole genesis, particularly in the Caribbean, and considerable European lexical and sometimes structural influence on the American Indian languages, if these have survived at all.

If we want to look for a single set of linguistic features, key linguistic traits of the Atlantic linguistic area would be, taking the Caribbean creoles as a point of departure:

- Relatively fixed SVO word order
- Preverbal marking of tense and aspect
- Limited pro-drop

- Limited morphological endings, particularly in the verb
- Analytic marking of clausal subordination

Thus the New World Spanish and Portuguese which is spoken near the Caribbean has been restructured, at least to some extent.

Obviously the above is only part of the story. Needed is detailed linguistic work on the varieties of the different languages and language families most involved in the Atlantic contact setting.

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