

Linguistic areas

E-Ching Ng · 21 Feb 2011 · Language contact reading group

- Campbell, Lyle (2006). Areal linguistics: A closer scrutiny. In *Linguistic areas: Convergence in historical and typological perspective*, ed. by Yaron Matras, April McMahon & Nigel Vincent. Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 1–31.

(1) Defining linguistic areas

- a. A geographic area
 - b. Shared structural feature(s) due to contact/borrowing
 - c. More than one such feature/isogloss
 - d. Two or more languages
 - e. Multiple language families
- I think these may have been intended as diagnostics, not definitions, e.g. the last.

(2) Campbell's questions

- a. Number of languages? — only two required
- b. Number of traits? — lower limits are arbitrary
- c. Isoglosses vs. core/periphery? — core is messier but justified
- d. Are there different kinds of 'linguistic area'? — yes
- e. Geography vs. vertical or same-location contact? — all of the above
- f. Inheritance vs. diffusion? — both, but inheritance has primacy (c.f. Dench 2001)

(3) Is there a clearcut difference between borrowing and areal linguistics?

- “A linguistic area, to the extent that it may have a legitimate existence at all, is merely the sum of borrowings in individual languages in contact situations.” (13)

Table 1: The two types of contact (Thomason & Kaufman 1988; Van Coetsem 1995)

Type of contact	Maintenance	Language shift
Type of change	Borrowing	Imposition/substratum change
Recipient language	Into dominant language or L1	Into non-dominant language or L2
More transfer of	(Less stable) lexical items ...	(More stable) phonology ...

- I agree that it's heavy borrowing, i.e. I'd expect loanwords as well as structural features.
- Hence I wouldn't even try to draw a clear line between dialect contact and language areas.
- ~~But I don't think we can say that linguistic areas don't exist, just because they're a type of borrowing. When human communities group into larger units, that could potentially be different in nature from one-on-one contact.~~ We agreed that the real question was whether different changes are observed in linguistic areas compared to borrowing.

References

- Coetsem, Frans van (1995). Outlining a model of the transmission phenomenon in language contact. *Leuvense Bijdragen* 84: 63-85.
- Dench, Alan (2001). Descent and diffusion: the complexity of the Pilbara situation. In *Areal diffusion and genetic inheritance: Problems in comparative linguistics*, ed. by Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald & R.M.W. Dixon. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 105–132. [Today's optional reading, presented by Erich]
- Thomason, Sarah Grey & Terrence Kaufman (1988). *Language Contact, Creolization, and Genetic Linguistics*. Berkeley; Los Angeles; Oxford: University of California Press.