Rossella Latorraca

# Multilingualism as linguistic chimerism. Conceptualizing language contact and English as a global contact language in a hybrid-oriented perspective

**Ente di afferenza:**
*()*

# Multilingualism as *linguistic chimerism*. Conceptualizing language contact and English as a global contact language in a hybrid-oriented perspective

by *Rossella Latorraca**

## Abstract

In a globalized world where cultural boundaries have become increasingly blurred, multilingual practices have changed the understanding of language contact and contact-induced influence in global encounters. In the era of transnational communication, multilingual practices often involve the use of the global contact language of English as a Lingua Franca, resulting in a plethora of linguistic hybrids that undergo fast and continuous evolution. Contemporary multilingualism rather occurs in the form of *linguistic chimeras*, i.e., hybrid and fully functional lects where the boundaries of the merged linguistic systems that make them are hard to detect. Although theoretical frameworks of language contact, developed within contact linguistics, have tried to conceptualize contact phenomena, traditional models do not do justice to the fluidity and dynamism of current multilingual and English-mediated communicative practices, which might fit in a more hybrid-oriented perspective, as this contribution suggests.

*Keywords*: Multilingualism, ELF, EIL, Translanguaging, Language contact.

## 1
## *Linguistic chimeras*: a hybrid perspective on new ecologies of language contact

For a very long time, evolutionary theories in biology and linguistics have developed in parallel, crossing each other and borrowing models to explain patterns in linguistic or biological evolution. A possible reason is that Darwin himself had built his evolutionary model of the speciation process on the reflections suggested by Sir John Herschel[1]. As pointed out by Whitfield (2008), in an interesting article about the long-standing parallel between language and species evolution, in his works *The Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871), Darwin suggested that species genealogy could be classified with the same method adopted for language genealogy, although some differences existed in terms of change and separation rates. This intriguing parallel between species and language evolution was further addressed in linguistics, to the point that Schleicher developed his well-known *Stammbaum* (the "pedigree") theory (1853). He thought that a language is not very different from a living organism

* University of Salerno; rlatorraca@unisa.it.

and, as such, its development is governed by the laws of biological evolution: it is born, lives over a specific life span, gives life to an offspring that will replace it and continue its lineage, thus allowing to trace a genealogical tree that can depict its historical development (Schleicher 1848; Ivic 2013). His conceptualization attempt produced a rather comprehensive model, as it also accounted for changes in linguistic traits resulting from language contact, by explaining them as a foreign influence producing effects similar to what happens in biological evolutionary crossbreeding in a strong fight for existence (Schleicher 1863). However, over time this model encountered some resistance among linguists (e.g., Hoenigswald, 1990; Alter, 1999; Campbell, 1999; Geisler & List, 2013), especially since languages do not separate and differentiate independently and abruptly but in a rather gradual and slow process resulting from mutual influence (Schuchardt, 2015, originally published 1900). As pointed out by McElvenny (2021), although this model had been labelled as a Darwinian reading of language evolution (De Graff, 2001), it was actually an attempt to describe language evolution within the frame of biology morphology, i.e., the analysis of the development of a living organism based on ontogeny and phylogenesis, by identifying similarities and differences among anatomical forms.

This bio-ecological turn, attempting to look at languages as 'cultural species' (Bastardas-Boada, 2017, p. 29), has been at the core of a large line of linguistic research, inspired by bio-evolutionary frameworks and aimed at the understanding of linguistic evolution resulting from language contact (Mufwene, 2008). However, this Darwinian perspective framing linguistic evolution as selective speciation does not encompass the terribly convoluted dynamics occurring in today's globalized, multilingual world.

### 1.1. From anagenesis to hybrid zones: a hybridization-inspired interpretation of language contact effects and its limitations

Drawing on the long-standing tradition of studying languages as species living and evolving in contact ecosystems, the traditional Darwinian anagenetic interpretation of language evolution cannot account for the mutual influence exercised by different and unrelated languages that come into contact for geographical and/or socioeconomic reasons. A possible speciation metaphor that can describe the evolutionary process of contact languages within a language contact ecology is the concept of "hybrid zone". Hybrid zones are areas populated by hybrids born from two genetically differentiated species, resulting in a genetic cline of one of the original populations in favor of the other (Barton & Hewitt, 1985). Before the creation of a hybrid zone, species tend to differentiate due to the existence of ecological and physiological barriers, that hamper crossbreeding and the survival of potential hybrids, creating what is known as *reproductive isolation*. However, one of these barriers can disappear, making reproductive isolation incomplete and eventually giving rise to a hybrid zone. At this point hybrids can undergo different scenarios: based on their fitness, they can become extinct due to their infertility, stabilize the hybrid zone, or produce offspring and differentiate as a new stable species.

The concept of hybrid zones actually exhibits some parallel features with the processes giving rise to contact languages. In light of the traditional model of language evolution and language contact, zeroed in the strata theory, languages develop and evolve independently and in parallel, due to a separation created by barriers of varied nature, in a sort of reproductive isolation. When one of these barriers falls due to a number of different reasons (conquests, migrations, technological advances in communicative applications, etc.), as advocated by the punctuational burst theory (Dixon, 1997; Janda & Joseph, 2003), such independent linguistic populations might come into contact, which in turn might trigger the emergence of hybrid forms of communication influenced by both L1s. At this point, a possible scenario is that hybrids exhibit a lower fitness than original L1s and prove unsatisfactory for more complex communicative functions, pushing them to expand from sorts of functional lexifiers to enriched "languages in their own right" (Matras, 2009) so that they "maximize their fitness" (Mufwene, 2018), eliminating the hybrid zone and creating a stable (language) species. Otherwise, if no pressure is exercised towards the creation of a reproductive isolation of hybrids, the hybrid zone becomes stable and is characterized by the coexistence of the original languages coming in contact and the hybrid contact language as well, in a scenario of di/triglossia where the contact language serves a precise function (Aikhenvald, 2002).

However intriguing this parallel might be, in that it might show some shared features between hybrid speciation and the emergence of contact languages, it does not account for the extremely high level of hybridization exhibited by contemporary multilingualism and contact language situations. Moreover, it does not encompass crossbreeding and mixing in fluid and very rapid processes, as multilingual practices look in contemporary global encounters.

<div align="center">

1.2. Chimerism as a model for multilingual practices
and English as a global contact language
</div>

In a globalized world where social, economic, political, and cultural boundaries have become increasingly blurred, the concepts of language contact and contact-induced influence take on a wider and more complex meaning. They are no longer described as a process of two languages clashing or interacting due to foreign occupation or mass migrations following natural disasters or human needs. Language contact, in the contemporary world, is far more complex and dynamic, and transcends borders of diverse nature and extent. In this era, not only do languages come into contact in the "traditional" way, but they also interact and intertwine deeply in non-physical contexts, thus creating some sort of *in silico*, transnational societies where multilingualism prevails.

The idea of extreme fluidity and dynamism across languages that manifests in multilingual contexts and translanguaging practices might be described using another metaphor, which borrows the (first mythological and then biological) concept of Chimaera. Historically, a Chimera was described by Greek, Roman and Etruscan

mythology as a hybrid creature whose physical attributes could be ascribed to various animals. Drawing on this definition, biology employs the term *genetic chimerism* to describe a tissue or an organism composed of two or more genetically distinct populations of cells coming from two or more distinct zygotes (Tippett, 1983). What is extraordinary about genetic chimerism is that, unlike the components of the mythological creature, it is impossible to detect it by casual observation and it can only emerge from careful genetic analysis, making chimeras fully organic genetic systems and not just a mechanical patchwork of distinct juxtaposed elements connected to work together.

In an era of fast globalization where communicative exchanges do not occur within or across traditional borders, the entire world has become a global contact area, governed by outstandingly dynamic and fluid realities (Horner & Weber, 2018), where multilingualism cannot be conceptualized within a monolingual framework, by means of a "definition by negation". In other words, it cannot be defined as a non-monolingual phenomenon or as a plurality of monolingualisms 'mastered separately in standard form and kept pure of outside influence' (Romaine, 2019, p. 258). Rather, it might be described in terms of heteroglossic and hybrid practices (e.g., Canagarajah, 2013; Rubdy & Alsagoff, 2013; Fang & Shaobin, 2016), where multilingualism seems to resemble more *polylingual languaging*, i.e., communicative practices in which language users can resort to any linguistic feature they have at their disposal (Jørgensen, 2008). However, this does not imply that they only draw on languages in which they have an extended competence. On the contrary, multilingual speakers tend to use whatever knowledge they have to achieve their communicative aims (Sebba, 2012). Concerning this, language contact can manifest itself by means of intricate and complex linguistic events where it is difficult to identify distinctive genetic lineages (Matras, 2009) of language entities co-participating in the multilingual practice, in a sort of hard-to-unravel *mixed language* (Krogull, 2021), characterized by hybrid forms and loans, and new unexpected nonces (Fang & Shaobin, 2016).

Given these considerations, multilingual practices are not deviating, subordinate versions of languages resulting from language contact but organic and fully functional linguistic systems, like chimeric organisms that live and evolve independently. Such a perspective aims to dignify non-standard and multilingual varieties by drifting apart from the monolingual normative framework, which analyzes multilingual practices in relation to "standard" languages involved. A chimeric flower is a full flower on its own and not an underdeveloped or "broken" version of its related flowers. Similarly, multilingual lects are nothing less than fully functional, organic lects with distinctive features, resulting from the fertile encounter and fusion of other linguistic systems (the zygotes). Chimeric lects thus embody the fluidity and dynamism with which speakers move across its hybrid and multifaceted features, inasmuch the complexity of their dynamic *linguagenesis* keeps on feeding on new knowledge and englobing new constitutional elements, while erasing boundaries between them.

The theoretical perspective presented hereby tries to answer the call for more fluid and hybrid-oriented frameworks to describe these phenomena and positions itself on

a continuum where contact linguistics has evolved, along with languages, from earlier monolingualism-oriented phases towards a more hybrid approach, as it is outlined in the next sections.

<div align="center">

**2**

## Contact linguistics and the traditional approach
## to language contact and contact languages

</div>

How language was born is a long-studied topic that does not cease to raise several questions for researchers in different disciplines (linguistics, biology, psychology, among others), from how language properties got their start to when they started and how they changed (Hauser *et al.*, 2002; Christiansen & Kirby, 2003; Hurford *et al.*, 1998; Jackendoff, 1999; Pinker & Jackendoff, 2005). However intriguing, to witness the birth of a language is a fortune that linguists rarely have, especially considering the way languages change and vary while being handed down from one generation to another. Nevertheless, some languages are younger than we think and keep changing and originating as a result of the encounter with other languages. Languages that are born from the contact between other languages are commonly known as *contact languages* (Bruyn, 1996; Sebba, 1997; Thomason, 1997).

Contact linguistics has a long tradition that dates back to antiquity, when language contact and multilingualism were rather commonplace in the European society, especially in upper educated classes, where people spoke more than one language, and scientific production, where the vernacular language was interspersed with loans, translations, and blends from the long-tradition scientific languages of Latin and Greek. With the emergence of contrastive linguistics, the comparison of different languages shed light on a number of phenomena resulting from language contact (Haugen, 1953; Weinreich, 1953) and investigated across multiple research lines including creole and pidgin origins, language shift, and code-switching (Broch, 1927; Kloss, 1927; Braun, 1939, among others).

The diverse lines of research converging in the discipline of contact linguistics explore and conceptualize language contact and its effects from an interdisciplinary perspective, merging linguistics, psycholinguistics, and sociolinguistics (Weinreich, 1953). These three outposts of investigation make it possible to describe how language contact results in the emergence of linguistic changes and the integration of such changes into new and existing languages (Weinreich *et al.*, 1968). In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of how language change buds and roots in linguistic behaviors, a holistic approach to language contact shall take into account both the individual and social sites where this phenomenon occurs. On the one hand, the processing of language change takes place in the individual speaker's mind, who may exhibit significant variation in their ability to keep their languages separated, their proficiency in one, some, or all of their languages, and their attitude towards them (Weinreich, 1953). On the other hand, these individuals might promote or inhibit, to

a certain extent, language change (Giles *et al.*, 1991; Eckert, 2000; Labov, 2001) and its spread across a broader social network of individuals, as a result of the interplay of deeper sociolinguistic factors (Backus, 2009). Indeed, language changes engendered from contact do not arise due to the structure of the language/s used by individuals but as the result of the individuals' sociolinguistic background (Thomason & Kaufman, 1988), which pushes speakers to change their language behaviors. In light of this, an analysis of language contact situations should also take into account the different aspects that characterize the contexts in which language contact occurs, from the population's economic and hierarchical structure to demographic factors, to the nature of contact and social interaction among groups and individuals, etc. (Gupta, 1997; Mufwene & Vigouroux, 2017; Schneider, 2020). In this framework, the level of multilingualism directly impacts the size of the influence resulting from language contact (Thomason, 2001). One way of conceptualizing this relationship is the multilingualism continuum model developed by Loveday (1996), which places the intensity and nature of language contact along a continuum stretching from minimal to maximal multilingualism. Different contact phenomena ranging from interference to borrowing, code-switching, code-mixing, and pidginization are then associated with the degree of contact on this continuum: the higher the degree of multilingualism, the higher the probability that a contact language and contact phenomena will arise in that setting.

An interesting outline of the possible outcomes of language contact is provided by Matras (2009), who defines contact languages based on their function as

a new medium of communication, the need for which arises in a situation of cross-language interaction among population groups in a variety of settings, ranging from minimal social contact and just occasional encounters for the purpose of trade to regular interethnic communication in a common socio-economic framework, and on to intense social contacts among groups speaking different languages within the same community and even within the same household (Matras, 2009, p. 275).

Given this definition, the major outcomes of language contact can be divided into mixed languages and pidgins (that might turn into creoles when they become the first language of a second generation). According to Matras (2009), mixed languages do not exhibit any simplification process (which differentiates them from pidgins) and include mixed features of more than one language, making it difficult to determine the linguistic genetic lineage in which the outcome might fall. Pidgins include languages that arise as a means of communication used by speakers who do not share a common language. In some situations, second- or foreign-language speakers contribute to the creation of a new variety of a language, which might undergo some conventionalization (i.e., pidginization) resulting in a new pidgin. In other cases, the continuous use of a lingua franca among groups of individuals with different background languages might result in a gradual evolution and stabilization of said lingua franca, giving birth to a new language resulting from contact.

Although it has been widely investigated, the concept of contact language still engenders some controversies over its definition. Some scholars believe that the notion of contact languages should only include languages that arise abruptly and evolve in a time span of a couple of generations of speakers (Bakker & Muysken, 1995; Bakker, 2000; Matras, 2009). This conceptualization fits in the idea of the breaking of the so-called *punctuated equilibrium* (Dixon, 1997). This theory was first formulated in evolutionary biology (Eldredge & Gould, 1972) to describe a phenomenon observed in fossil records, where new species that appeared maintained a relatively stable lineage and exhibited little or no change for millions of years. The theory was then borrowed by the social sciences as a framework to understand social change in complex social systems (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993), postulating that social systems undergo long periods of stasis, which are interrupted by abrupt shifts resulting in radical social changes. Within contact linguistics, the theory was adjusted to describe a period of peaceful coexistence of different languages that are mutually influenced in a slow, unnoticed manner. Occasionally, however, this equilibrium breaks due to rapid changes (like conquests or sudden migrations due to natural disasters), leading to *punctuational bursts*, which have been considered a major trigger of language evolution and associated with the emergence of new languages (Dixon, 1997; Janda & Joseph, 2003). In this sense, punctuational language change has been seen as a reflection of the "human capacity to rapidly adjust languages at critical times of cultural evolution, such as during the emergence of new and rival groups" (Atkinson *et al.* 2008). Although the model has been supported by several scholars (e.g., Andersen 2006), it has also been criticized (Watkins; 2001; Heine and Kuteva 2006; Hudson 2019), as it does not pay much attention to the gradual changes occurring in long periods of stable bilingualism, especially considering the current state of diffused multilingualism, which makes long and iterated language contact an integral part of the development of any language.

# 3
## Contact-induced influence[2]

In light of the acknowledgement of prolonged multilingualism as a major aspect of our globalized society, it is worth considering how the long coexistence of languages results in mutual changes and the potential emergence of a new language or variety.

When it comes to the description of contact-induced influence and changes occurring in contact languages, scholars usually refer to the "strata" model, which was first conceptualized by the Italian scholar Graziadio Isaia Ascoli (1881, in Tristram, 2007) to explain differences across Romance languages and then applied to several language families in contrastive linguistics. According to this model, when two languages come into contact, they gradually influence each other, although to different extents. When, for some reasons (conquests, migrations, socio-economic cultural propagation, etc.), two languages share the same context and coexist over a long period, this language contact can result in two possible consequences: the two different populations retain

their own languages, although with some mutual changes, or L1 speakers shift to the L2 language. The first scenario (L1 maintenance) can arise due to several reasons, including situations where the two languages might be equally dominant or they might coexist in a functional compartmentalized organization (namely, diglossia), or they might continue to mutually influence each other to the point that they mutate into a common variety and engender common cultural perspectives (Bhattacharya, 1974; Ross, 2001). In the strata model, this latter phenomenon is known as the *adstratum* influence, which eventually leads to the emergence of a Sprachbund, a group of languages that seem to be related even though they might be genetically distant or not related at all, as a result of areal linguistic changes engendered by language contact, as in the case of the Balkan (Friedman, 1997) and the Amazonian Sprachbunds (Aikhenvald, 2002). The second scenario (shift to L2 language) depicts collective language acquisition of the dominant second language because of the superimposition (by subjugation or spontaneously) of an L2 over the L1. This phenomenon can take place either by adopting the superimposed language, as in the case of a subjugated population adopting the language of their conquerors or by gradually shifting to the dominant language. This is what happened in the 11th century, after the Norman conquest, when Normans gradually shifted from Norman French to English, although English had a lower prestige. When a population adopts a foreign language, because of a superimposition, their first language tends to act as a baseline upon which they build and construe their version of the newly acquired L2. In so doing, some features of the L1 are inescapably carried over to the L2, which then develops upon the L1 *substrate*, undergoing the so-called *substratum influence.* On the contrary, when the superimposed language surrenders to the L1 of the main population (as in the example of Norman French shifting to English), in the long run, the surviving L1 will integrate many features of the superimposed language, showing the effects of a *superstratum influence*.

Language-contact-induced influence usually develops in a diffusive manner, i.e., by the spreading of linguistic features across languages and people, either directly with lexical and grammatical borrowings or indirectly with borrowed or calqued patterns (Aikhenvald, 2019). The replication of elements from an L2 in an L1 (and vice versa) can take the form of unchanged units of a language reproduced when speaking in the other language, especially at the word level, which is usually described as *borrowing*. In some other cases, speakers employ and readjust features of the L2 to creatively produce new forms that do not exist yet. In other words, the result of language contact-induced influence is the creation of a 'replica' language whose structures are built and edited based on the 'model' language (e.g., in calques, pseudo-loans and semantic loans). Other conceptualizations of these two replication processes define them as *matter vs. pattern replication* (Matras & Sakel, 2007; Sakel & Matras, 2008), *importation vs. calque* (Haugen, 1950), and *global vs. selective copying* (Johanson, 2002), among others.

The strata model and contact-induced influence conceptualizations can certainly apply to modern instances of language contact, especially if the concepts of "conquest", "migration", and "propagation" are expanded in a more socio-cultural perspective.

However, the blur of boundaries that characterizes the contemporary world is increasingly reflected in blurred manifestations of linguistic contamination, which can only be partially described by contrastive "analogical" models that tend to devise contaminations by grounding them within monolingualism, where contact is described as an encounter of monolingual participants speaking different L1s.

Drawing upon the idea of the fluidity of multilingual repertoires in global encounters, the way contact languages arise and evolve, especially in translanguaging practices and English-mediated international encounters, does not fit the traditional models of punctuated equilibrium and language evolution but can be reframed in a more hybrid-oriented perspective.

## 4
## Multilingual and English-mediated encounters
## as factories of chimeric languages

As already anticipated, the discussion of language contact and contact-induced influence in the contemporary world brings in a new and more complex idea of "contact", which must take into account the increasing blurring of boundaries and fluidity of means and modes of communication (Baker, 2019). In such a context, dominated by growing multilingualism, English is often used as a mediating language and has gradually spread around the whole globe, to the point that the number of native speakers of English has been largely surpassed by non-native users, exhibiting an increasing diversity of English uses (Widdowson, 1994; Brumfit, 2001; Jenkins, 2015).

In the last forty years, the World Englishes (WE) and English as an International Language (EIL) paradigms have investigated and conceptualized the use of English in diversified geographical settings, with the aim of developing a taxonomic classification of different "local" varieties of English (Schneider, 2007; 2011; Smith, 2015). In this context, the idea of English grows larger and expands to include new Englishes that do not originate as traditional Anglophone varieties but meet and clash in international settings. The focus on internationality, however, still emphasizes the existence of (inter)*national* borders, both of a geographical and conceptual nature (Pennycook, 2007), implying that, when using English in international contexts, speakers bring their national variety of this language (such as an Italian variety of English spoken by Italian native speakers), which is unable to evolve into a stabilized variety passed on as L1 to the next generations (Mauranen, 2012). This perspective is a first attempt to account for the contribution of foreign speakers and their communicative resources in the creation of a national (yet "foreign") variety of English that, although being national, is uniquely shaped by merging a diversity of features originating in different contexts and cultures. In this sense, these "national" varieties of English spoken by foreigners in international encounters are characterized by *chimeric* integrations of linguistic features, that merge and evolve in unpredictable ways, to the point that it becomes hard to identify clear patterns of elements that can trace a "national" trend. This conceptualization of a national version

of English used in international contacts lies on a twofold false assumption. On the one hand, it describes the communicative instances of English in international contexts in light of a contrastive analysis that compares them with the native monolingual model, thus reinforcing a certain traditional position looking at any other non-native instance of English as a distorted deviation from *the* standard. On the other hand, it envisions a framework in which linguistic systems can still be contained within geographical borders and keep functioning within these borders even in global encounters (Ishikawa, 2017). In such varied contexts and communities of usage, it has been advocated that EIL should not be described as an actual variety of English but more as the communicative function served by the English language in multilingual and international contexts, whereby "each speaker brings a variety of English that they are most familiar with, along with their cultural frames of reference" (Matsuda, 2017, p. XIII).

The attention to the individual contribution to the use of English in global contact situations pushed scholars to investigate this phenomenon in light of the absence of physical borders and the extremely miscellaneous communities where such a language is employed as a means of communication. In these contexts, non-English natives speak their own individual version of English, which is inevitably influenced by their different L1s, defined by Mauranen (2012) as *similects* of English. These individual versions are characterized by extremely hybrid repertoires, which can be conceptualized as different contact languages that meet in global encounters, showing differences and sharing similarities. However, albeit they might share some features, they do not arise as a result of mutual interaction but in parallel, so that a community of speakers sharing the same similect never emerges and they "remain forever first-generation hybrids: each generation's, each speaker's idiolect is a new hybrid" (Mauranen, 2012, p. 29). Once again, although opening to a more hybrid-oriented perspective, the concept of similects still gathers these individual contact varieties in a mostly undifferentiated jumble of idiolects that are all "similar" to one another, in light of the fact that they might be supposedly influenced by the same L1 and all share their unfulfilled ambition to resemble the native normative model. However, the very hybrid nature of an idiolect is not only informed by the individual's L1 but it also feeds on a person's potential second, third, *n* language, and by a plethora of different modes, frameworks, and communicative experiences that all contribute to its development. These and other elements interplay in unforeseeable ways that edit and mold an individual's hybrid lect, in a sort of cognitive ecology of language change (Hutchins, 2010). The result of these informative clashes and merges is the production of a new, hybrid, and ever-evolving linguistic organism characterized by the *chimerism* of its communicative verbal and non-verbal resources.

Considering this multi-sourced perspective of global language contact, Jenkins advocated for a repositioning of English-mediated global communication, within a multilingualism-oriented framework, where English as a Multi-Lingua Franca (ELF) is used in "multilingual communicative settings in which English is known to everyone present, and is therefore *always potentially 'in the mix'*, regardless of whether or not, and how much, it is actually used" (Jenkins, 2015, p. 74, italics in the original). Therefore,

in an ELF framework English is not the only medium of communication but a shared resource that speakers can resort to if and when they want to, among multiple diverse resources that constitute their entire repertoire. Although multilingualism is thus acknowledged in the ELF-oriented framework, it tends to be considered an aspect of ELF, resulting in the investigation of diverse uses of English by comparing them with a monolingual normative model embodied by English native speakers (Mauranen, 2012; Seidlhofer, 2005). However, as Cenoz (2019) suggested, multilingualism cannot be seen as an aspect of English as a Lingua Franca but it should be reframed as the context in which ELF is resorted to as a means of communication.

This focus on the critical role played by multilingualism in shaping language contacts and global communication has changed, over time, the way languages and language contact are framed within a multilingual perspective. Nowadays, language contact and contact-induced multilingualism cannot be limited to geographically identifiable areas where the existence of geographical borders or trade routes promoted the development of multilingual communication. Social borders are no longer limiting the spread of multilingualism, which is pervading all the social strata, regardless of people's national, professional, and sociocultural backgrounds (Aronin & Singleton, 2008). Moreover, the immediacy, promptness, and multimodality that characterize contemporary communication change the way multilingual speakers incorporate different semiotic resources and modalities (Canagarajah, 2018), thus shaping, (re) construing and crossing new types of borders.

This multilingual perspective looks at the way speakers communicate in transnational contexts by resorting to their entire linguistic repertoire, which reveals itself as a *chimera* of all the linguistic resources acquired and all the encounters made over time. These all contribute to the development of their own hybrid idiolect, which is almost impossible to dissect, since its original matrixes and components have irreparably transformed and keep evolving and adjusting depending on contexts and purposes:

the interactants are making use of their multi-faceted multilingual repertoires in a fashion motivated by the communicative purpose and the interpersonal dynamics of the interaction. In many speech events, boundaries between languages also seem to be perceived as fluid or irrelevant (Seidlhofer, 2009, p. 242).

Indeed, the fluidity of contexts, cultures, and communicative resources makes it possible to reframe multilingualism, and especially the use of ELF, within translanguaging events, which comprehensively depict contact communication in transnational contexts by effectively integrating and hybridizing multiple semiotic resources. English as a Lingua Franca and, more generally, English as a global contact language, can thus "be conceptualized as a translanguaging act where [...] it encompasses diverse and fluid practices rather than static, separated, and universal language behaviours" (Ou, Gu & Hult, 2020). In translanguaging events, speakers assemble and combine all of these resources to shape different forms of their repertoires and can move dynamically

across different languages (Wei, 2018). This significant fluidity that characterizes translanguaging practices is the very sign that the *chimeric lect* a speaker resorts to when communicating is not a mere juxtaposition of distinct elements but a fully operating communicative system that has a "linguistic life" of its own.

In this framework, ELF is only one of the resources that can be employed for communication purposes, acting as one of many (inter)combinable matrixes that create a plethora of linguistic and non-linguistic possibilities to cope with complex negotiations in multilingual contexts (Pennycook & Otsuji, 2014; Zhu, 2015). This focus on the fluidity of communicative practices that transcend languages and combine multiple semiotic resources in an integrated, *chimeric repertoire* reframes the concept of ELF and translanguaging communication in multilingual contexts as instances of *chimeric lects* that are not diverted attempts to copy a native normative model but valuable, unique languages on their own.

## 5
## Conclusion

In the modern world governed by growing globalization, communicative boundaries have increasingly blurred and the whole idea of "contact" has taken on a much more complex and multifaceted meaning. In such a context, communication tends to occur in multilingual and international encounters, often mediated by English as a global contact language. Over the time, linguists have tried to conceptualize these communicative practices by integrating the idea of "hybrids", in describing ELF (Jenkins, 2015), similects (Mauranen, 2012), and translanguaging (Wei, 2018). However, as outlined in these models, the linguistic systems used in multilingual contexts and individual repertoires in translanguaging practices might appear as "underdeveloped" varieties of L1s or L2s (Nelson, 2011; Schneider, 2011), calling for "a theoretical framework which covers the dynamics [...] of poststructural hybridity in global interactions" (Schneider, 2014, p. 28).

The concept of *linguistic chimerism* tries then to answer this call for a perspective that values the hybridity of global communicative practices, by attempting to provide a definition of what these practices attain to do, instead of what they supposedly fail to achieve. Global encounters occur within contact linguistic practices characterized by extreme intricateness and fluidity. Just like chimeras, the resulting hybrid linguistic systems evolve and adjust in unpredictable ways and the sources they are informed by are almost impossible to trace back to (Matras, 2009). Within the context of global encounters, English is only one of the resources speakers have at their disposal, and when they do resort to English as a global contact language, they draw upon their own idiolect, which is still a chimeric instance in that it embeds a wide gamut of other elements. No *chimeric lects* and, more specifically, individual Englishes are deviations from a superior unattainable native "language standard by virtue of place of birth" (Holliday, 2009, p. 151). On the contrary, their value does lie in the very uniqueness of their hybrid evolution and ability to adjust to a rapidly changing world, by taking

in changes and incorporating them into a balanced, operational system. This is how species do not succumb to drastic transformations but survive and thrive by building upon them. In this framework of global, multidirectional contact, *linguistic chimerisms* are likely to govern new modes and ecologies of global communication, reflecting dynamic and fluid practices across any aspect of the global society.

## Notes

1. Darwin Correspondence Project (1837) Letter 346 – Darwin, C. R. to Darwin, C. S., 27 Feb 1837, in http://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/darwinletters/calendar/entry-346.html (Accessed 8 November 2022).

2. Changes resulting from language contact have been conceptualized and labeled in different ways, from Weinreich's (1953) *interference* (deviation) and *transference* (borrowing), to Haugen's three-phase model (1953) of *code-switching*, *interference*, and *integration*, to Lanstyák and Heltai's *discourse transfer* (2012). Different labels depend on the conceptualization of the different types and directions of contact-induced influence but this contribution does not aim to delve into a taxonomy of categories of contact effects. Therefore, the expression *(language) contact-induced influence* is to be understood as embracing any effect and change resulting from language contact.

## References

Aikhenvald A. Y. (2002), *Language contact in Amazonia*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Aikhenvald A. Y. (2019), *Language contact and areal linguistics*, in C. Genetti (ed.), *How languages work an introduction to language and linguistics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 314-35.

Alter S. G. (1999), *Darwinism and the linguistic image: Language, race, and natural theology in the nineteenth century*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore.

Andersen H., Bellwood P., Renfrew C. (eds.), *Examining the farming/language dispersal hypothesis*, in "Folia Linguistica Historica", 40, pp. 201-7.

Aronin L., Singleton D. (2008), *Multilingualism as a new linguistic dispensation*, in "International Journal of Multilingualism", 5, 1, pp. 1-16.

Atkinson Q. D., Meade A., Venditti C., Greenhill S. J., Pagel M. (2008), *Languages evolve in punctuational bursts*, in "Science", 319, 5863, p. 588.

Backus A. (2009), *Codeswitching as one piece of the puzzle of language change: The case of Turkish yapmak*, in L. Isurin, D. Winford, K. de Bot (eds.), *Multidisciplinary approaches to code switching*, John Benjamins, Amsterdam, pp. 307-36.

Baker W. (2015), *Culture and identity through English as a lingua franca: Rethinking concepts and goals in intercultural communication*, De Gruyter Mouton, Berlin.

Baker W., Sangiamchit C. (2019), *Transcultural communication: Language, communication and culture through English as a lingua franca in a social network community*, in "*Language and Intercultural Communication*", 19, 6, pp. 471-87.

Bakker P. (2000), *Convergence intertwining: An alternative way towards the genesis of mixed languages*, in D. Gilbers, J. Nerbonne, J. Schaeken (eds.), *Languages in contact*, Brill, Leiden, pp. 29-35.

Bakker P., Muysken P. (1995), *Mixed languages and language intertwining*, in J. Arends, P. Muysken, N. Smith (eds.), *Pidgins and creoles: An introduction*, John Benjamins, Amsterdam, pp. 41-52.

Barton N. H., Hewitt G. M. (1985), *Analysis of hybrid zone*, in "Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics", 6, pp. 113-48.

Bastardas-Boada A. (2017), *The ecology of language contact: Minority and majority languages*, in A. F. Fill, H. Penz (eds.), *The Routledge handbook of ecolinguistics*, Routledge, New York, pp. 26-39.

Baumgartner F., Jones B. D. (1993), *Agendas and instability in American politics*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Bhattacharya S. (1974), *Linguistic convergence in the Dravido-Munda culture area*, in "International Journal of Dravidian Linguistics", 4, pp. 199-213.

Braun M. (1939), *Beobachtungen zur Frage der Mehrsprachigkeit*, in "Göttingsche Gelehrte Anzeigen", 199, pp. 116-30.

Broch O. (1927), *Russernosk*, in "Archiv für slavische Philologie", 41, pp. 209-67.

Brumfit C. (2001), *Individual freedom in language teaching*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Bruyn A. (1996), *On identifying instances of grammaticalization in Creole languages*, in P. Baker, Syea A. (eds.), *Changing meanings, changing functions: Papers relating to grammaticalization in contact languages*, University of Westminster Press, London, pp. 29-46.

Campbell L. (1999), *Historical linguistics: An introduction*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh.

Canagarajah S. (2013), *Translingual practice: Global Englishes and cosmopolitan relations*, Routledge, London.

Canagarajah S. (2018), *Translingual practice as spatial repertoires: Expanding the paradigm beyond structuralist orientations*, in "Applied Linguistics", 39, 1, pp. 31-54.

Cenoz J. (2019), *Translanguaging pedagogies and English as a lingua franca*, in "Language Teaching", 52, 1, pp. 71-85.

Christiansen M. H., Kirby S. (eds.) (2003), *Language evolution*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Darwin C. (1859), *On the origin of species by means of natural selection: Or the preservation of favoured races in the struggle for life*, John Murray, London.

Darwin C. (1871), *The descent of man, and selection in relation to sex*, John Murray, London.

DeGraff M. (2001), *On the origin of Creoles: A Cartesian critique of neo-darwinian linguistics*, in "Linguistic Typology", 5, pp. 213-310.

Dixon R. M. W. (1997), *The rise and fall of languages*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Eckert P. (2000), *Language variation as social practice: The linguistic construction of identity in Belten High*, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford.

Eldredge N., Gould S. J. (1972), *Punctuated equilibria: An alternative to phyletic gradualism*, in "Models in paleobiology", pp. 82-115.

Fang Q., Shaobin M. (2016), *Translingual creativities: A sociolinguistic case study of English lexical borrowings in Mandarin from perspectives of language contact*, in "Asian Englishes", 18, 1, pp. 19-35.

Friedman V. (1997), *One grammar, three lexicons: Ideological overtones and underpinnings in the Balkan Sprachbund*, in K. Singer, R. Eggert, G. Anderson (eds.), *CLS 33: Papers from the panels on linguistic ideologies in contact, universal grammar, parameters and typology, the perception of speech and other acoustic signals*, Chicago Linguistic Society, Chicago, pp. 23-44.

Geisler H., List J.-M. (2013), *Do languages grow on trees? The tree metaphor in the history of linguistics*, in H. Fangerau, H. Geisler, T. Halling, W. Martin (eds.), *Classification and*

*evolution in biology, linguistics and the history of science: Concepts – methods – visualization*, Steiner, Stuttgart, pp. 111-24.

Giles H., Coupland N., Coupland J. (1991), *Accommodation theory: Communication, context, and consequence*, in H. Giles, J. Coupland, N. Coupland (eds.), *Contexts of accommodation: Developments in applied sociolinguistics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 1-68.

Graziadio I. A. (1881), *Die ethnologischen Gründe der sprachlichen Umgestaltungen, authorised translation of Ascoli's Sprachwissenschaftliche Briefe by Bruno Güterbock (Leipzig, 1887)*, pp. 13-45; first published in "Rivista di filologia e d'istruzione classica" 10, 1881. Reprinted in R. Kontzi (ed.), *Substrate und Superstrate in den romanischen Sprachen*, Darmstadt, pp. 29-54.

Gupta A. F. (1997), *Colonisation, migration and functions of English*, in E. W. Schneider (ed.), *Englishes around the world: General studies, British isles, North America. Studies in honour of Manfred Görlach*, John Benjamins, Amsterdam, pp. 47-58.

Haugen E. (1950), *The analysis of linguistic borrowing*, in "Language", 26, pp. 210-31.

Haugen E. (1953), *The Norwegian language in the Americas: A study in bilingual behavior*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington.

Hauser M. D., Chomsky N., Fitch W. T. (2002), *The faculty of language: What is it, who has it, and how did it evolve?*, in "Science", 298, 5598, pp. 1569-79.

Heine B., Kuteva T. (2006), *The changing languages of Europe*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Hoenigswald H. M. (1990), *Does language grow on trees?*, in "Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society", 134, 1, pp. 10-8.

Holliday A. (2009), *The role of culture in English language education: Key challenges*, in "Language and Intercultural Communication", 9, 3, pp. 144-55.

Horner K., Weber J. J. (2018), *Introducing multilingualism: A social approach*, 2nd ed., Routledge, London.

Hudson M. J. (2019), *Socio-ecological resilience and language dynamics: An adaptive cycle model of long-term language change*, in "Journal of Language Evolution", 4, 1, pp. 19-27.

Hurford J., Studdert-Kennedy M., Knight C. (eds.) (1998), *Approaches to the Evolution of Language*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Hutchins E. (2010), *Cognitive ecology*, in "Topics in Cognitive Science", 2, 4, pp. 705-15.

Ishikawa T. (2017), *Conceptualising English as a global contact language*, in "Englishes in Practice", 4, 2, pp. 31-49.

Ivic M. (2013), *Trends in Linguistics*, De Gruyter Mouton, Berlin.

Jackendoff R. (1999), *Some possible stages in the evolution of the language capacity*, in "Trends in Cognitive Sciences", 3, 7, pp. 272-9.

Janda R. D., Joseph B. D. (2003), *On language, change, and language change: Or, of history, linguistics, and historical linguistics*, in B. D. Joseph, R. D. Janda (eds.), *The handbook of historical linguistics*, Blackwell, Oxford, pp. 1-180.

Jenkins J. (2015), *Global Englishes: A resource book for students*, 3rd ed., Routledge, London.

Johanson L. (2002), *Structural factors in Turkic language contacts*, Routledge, London.

Jørgensen J. N. (2008), *Polylingual languaging around and among children and adolescents*, in "International Journal of Multilingualism", 5, 3, pp. 161-76.

Kloss H. (1927), *Spracherhaltung*, in "Archiv für Politik und Geschichte", 5, 4, pp. 456-62.

Krogull A. (2021), *Rethinking historical multilingualism and language contact 'from below'. Evidence from the Dutch-German borderlands in the long nineteenth century*, in "Dutch Crossing", 45, 2, pp. 147-70.

Labov W. (2001), *Principles of linguistic change: Social factors*, Vol. 2, Blackwell Publishers, Malden (MA).

Lanstyák I., Heltai P. (2012), *Universals in language contact and translation*, in "Across Languages and Cultures", 13, 1), pp. 99-121.

Loveday L. (1996), *Language contact in Japan: A sociolinguistic*, Clarendon Press, Oxford.

Matras Y. (2009), *Language contact*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Matras Y., Sakel J. (2007), *Investigating the mechanisms of pattern-replication in language convergence*, in "Studies in Language", 31, 4, pp. 829-65.

Matsuda A. (ed.) (2017), *Preparing teachers to teach English as an international language*, Multilingual Matters, Bristol.

Mauranen A. (2012), *Exploring ELF: Academic English shaped by non-native speakers*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

McElvenny J. (2021), *Language complexity in historical perspective: The enduring tropes of natural growth and abnormal contact*, in "Frontiers in Communication", 6.

Mufwene S. S. (2008), *Language evolution, competition and change*, Bloomsbury Publishing, London.

Mufwene S. S. (2018), *Language evolution from an ecological perspective*, In A. Fill, H. Benz (eds.), *The Routledge handbook of ecolinguistics*, Routledge. New York, pp. 73-88.

Mufwene S. S., Vigouroux C. B. (2017), *Individuals, populations, and timespace: Perspectives on the ecology of language revisited*, in "Language Ecology", 1, 1, pp. 75-103.

Nelson C. L. (2011), *Intelligibility in world Englishes: Theory and application*, Routledge, London.

Ou W. A., Gu M. M., Hult F. M. (2020), *Translanguaging for intercultural communication in international higher education: transcending English as a lingua franca*, in "International Journal of Multilingualism", article published online.

Pennycook A. (2007), *Global Englishes and transcultural flows*, Routledge, London.

Pennycook A., Otsuji E. (2014), *Market lingos and metrolingua francas*, in "International Multilingual Research Journal", 8, 4, pp. 255-70.

Pinker S., Jackendoff R. (2005), *The faculty of language: What's special about it?*, in "Cognition", 95, pp. 201-36.

Romaine S. (2019), *Multilingualism*, in J. Darquennes, J. C. Salmons, W. Vandenbussche (eds.). *Language contact: An international handbook, vol. 1*, De Gruyter, Berlin, pp. 257-70.

Ross M. (2001), *Contact-induced change in Oceanic languages in northwest Melanesia*, in A. Y. Aikhenvald., R. M. W. Dixon (eds.), *Areal diffusion and genetic inheritance: Problems in comparative linguistics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 134-66.

Rubdy R., Alsagoff L. (2013), *The cultural dynamics of globalization: Problematizing hybridity*, in R. Rubdy, L. Alsagoff (eds.), *The global-local interface, language choice and hybridity*, Multilingual Matters, London, pp. 1-14.

Sakel J., Matras Y. (2008), *Modelling contact-induced change in grammar*, in T. Stolz, D. Bakker, R. Salas Palomo (eds.), *Aspects of language contact: New theoretical, methodological and empirical findings with special focus on Romanisation processes*, Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin, pp. 63-87.

Schleicher A. (1848), *Zur Vergleichenden Sprachengeschichte*, König, Bonn.

Schleicher A. (1853), *Die ersten Spaltungen des indogermanischen Urvolkes*, in "Allgemeine Monatsschrift für Wissenschaft und Literatur", 3, pp. 786-7.

Schleicher A. (1863), *Die Darwinsche Theorie und die Sprachwissenschaft*, Hermann Böhlau, Leipzig.

Schneider E. W. (2007), *Postcolonial English: Varieties around the world*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Schneider E. W. (2011), *English around the world: An introduction*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Schneider E. W. (2014), *New reflections on the evolutionary dynamics of world Englishes*, in "World Englishes", 33, 1, pp. 9-32.

Schneider E. W. (2020), *Developmental patterns of English: Similar or different?*, in A. Kirkpatrick (ed.), *The Routledge handbook of world Englishes*, Routledge, London, pp. 408-21.

Schuchardt H. (2015), *Über die Klassifikation der romanischen Mundarten*, in M. Messling, M. A. Lenz, P. Krämer (eds.), *Rassedenken in der Sprach- und Textreflexion*, Brill, Leiden

Sebba M. (1997), *Contact languages*, Macmillan, Houndmills.

Sebba M. (2012), *Multilingualism in written discourse: An approach to the analysis of multilingual texts*, in "International Journal of Bilingualism", 17, pp. 97-118.

Seidlhofer B. (2005), *English as a lingua franca*, in "ELT Journal", 59, 4, pp. 339-41.

Seidlhofer B. (2009), *Common ground and different realities: World Englishes and English as a lingua franca*, in "World Englishes", 28, pp. 236-45.

Smith L. E. (2015), *English as an international language: No room for linguistic chauvinism*, in "Journal of English as a lingua franca", 4, 1, pp. 165-71.

Thomason S. G. (ed.) (1997), *Contact languages: A wider perspective*, John Benjamins, Amsterdam.

Thomason S. G. (2001), *Language contact*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh.

Thomason S. G., Kaufman T. (1988), *Language contact, creolization, and genetic linguistics*, University of California Press, Berkeley.

Tippett P. (1983), *Blood group chimeras: A review*, in "Vox sanguinis", 44, 6, pp. 333-59.

Tristram H. (2007), *Why don't the English speak Welsh?*, in N. Higham (ed.), *Britons in Anglo-Saxon England*, Boydell & Brewer, Woodbridge, pp. 192-214.

Watkins C. (2001), *An Indo-European linguistic area and its characteristics: Ancient Anatolia. Areal diffusion as a challenge to the comparative method?*, in A. Y. Aikhenvald, R. M. W. Dixon (eds.), *Areal diffusion and genetic inheritance: Problems in comparative linguistics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 44-63.

Wei L. (2018), *Translanguaging as a practical theory of language*, in "Applied Linguistics", 39, 1, pp. 9-30.

Weinreich U. (1953), *Languages in contact*, Mouton, The Hague.

Weinreich U., Labov W., Herzog M. I. (1968), *Empirical foundations for a theory of language change*, in W. P. Lehmann, Y. Malkiel (eds.), *Directions for historical linguistics: A symposium*, University of Texas Press, Austin, pp. 95-195.

Whitfield J. (2008), *Across the curious parallel of language and species evolution*, in "PLOS Biology", 6, 7.

Widdowson H. G. (1994), *The ownership of English*, in "TESOL Quarterly", 28, 2, pp. 377-89.

Zhu H. (2015), *Negotiation as the way of engagement in intercultural and lingua franca communication: Frames of reference and interculturality*, in "Journal of English as a Lingua Franca", 4, 1, pp. 63-90.