

Workshop: Amerindian Languages in Contact Situations:
Spanish-American Perspectives

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Call for Papers

The linguistic situations in present-day Spanish America have been shaped to a considerable extent by the long-term contact among the indigenous languages and cultures, which has resulted in profound consequences for the participating languages. Although many of the possible lexical, phonological, and structural commonalities among these languages have been explored in prior literature (cf. Campbell, Kaufman, and Smith Stark 1986 and Smith Stark 1994 for Mesoamerica), there are no more recent comparable attempts at a study of the relevant areal traits. Detailed studies placing the structural features of individual languages within their areal contexts are also lacking, as are attempts to place the areal linguistic adaptations within the wider context of human ecology, in the sense proposed by Hill (1978), in sharp contrast with the amount of attention that continues to be received by linguistic areas located in other areas of the world, such as the Balkans, Ethiopia, or Southeast Asia.

Another important factor for the history of contact in the area is that since the early sixteenth century, the indigenous languages have been in close contact with Spanish. This proximity has left a profound imprint on the languages, changing each in a variety of ways that range from influences on lexicon and phonology to impact on diverse levels of the languages' morphology, syntax, and discourse. In the process, regional Spanish, including the national varieties of Latin American Spanish, has undergone a number of changes as well.

Finally, reconstruction of linguistic and cultural histories of individual languages is greatly aided by the study of loanword adaptations. By studying phonetic, structural, and semantic changes in the borrowed words, it is possible to trace not only the direction of borrowing and source languages but also the relative chronology of borrowing (linguistic stratigraphy in the sense of Andersen 2003) and the type and nature of past contacts. Inferences drawn from a careful study of loanwords are especially important in the case of unwritten languages and those that only recently have begun to be written, including most languages of Hispano-America.

The proposed workshop will combine these research threads by focusing on the diachronic aspects of language contact in Spanish America. Its principal goals are to spark an interest in further study of the possible areal traits, especially as they relate to the wider issue of area-level human adaptations; to highlight the importance of contact-induced changes observable in these areas for contact and diachronic linguistics more generally; to contribute to the study of linguistic stratigraphy; and to provide a context for a meaningful dialogue between students of the indigenous languages and those of Spanish. In addition, the workshop seeks to bring together scholars from different language backgrounds, linguistic traditions, and theoretical orientations with the aim of fostering collaborative research on these complex areas.

References

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