The Tsimshian English Dialect:
The Result of Language Interference

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1. Introduction

Language contact is a fundamental source of many
aspects of linguistic variation. Only recently, how-
ever, has there been much interest evinced in explicit-
ly accounting for the processes relating particular
variations to language contact (e.g. Leap (1978) on the
interference of Isletan Tiwa and English). The aim of
this paper is to rectify this situation by providing a
case study of the dialect variations in English as it
is spoken in the Coast Tsimshian communities of British
Columbia. From a survey of the distinctive character-
istics of this dialect, it is argued that many of the
distinctions can be precisely related to habitualized
linguistic interference or to cultural contact. Par-
ticular emphasis is placed on accounting for the stim-
uli governing the extent and frequency of the interfer-
ence. In addition, it is argued that in language
shift, interference affects all domains of the 'win-
ning' language, from the phonemic system to the syntax,
as well as the lexicon. Finally, this investigation

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provides evidence towards delimiting the types of in-
terference that can be habitualized and the socio-cul-
tural setting necessary for habitualization to occur.

Sm'algyax, the native name for the Coast Tsim-
shian language, is spoken on the northern coast of
British Columbia and also (since the late 19th centruy)
in Metlakatla, Alaska. Tsimshians in Alaska number a-
bout 1,000, with about 200 speakers of the language,
none of them children. There are approximately 2,800
Canadian Coast Tsimshians. Contemporary communities
include Hartley Bay, Kitkatla, Port Simpson, Old Metla-
katla, and the mixed Heiltsuk Kwakiutl/Coast Tsimshian
village of Klemtu. In addition there are large numbers
of Coast Tsimshian people in Prince Rupert and Terrace.
Although there is no accurate survey of the total num-
ber of Canadian speakers of the language, Seguin
(1979a) has done a detailed census of the speech com-
munity at Hartley Bay. Briefly, of the 176 resident
community members, 104 were placed in categories rang-
ing from 'complete fluency' (may be more comfortable in
Sm'algyax than in English for some topics) to 'minimal
competence' (generally converses in English, but com-
prehends Sm'algyax and uses Sm'algyax words and phrases
when speaking English). Of the remaining 72, 58 were
listed as having 'no practical competence' (apparent

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comprehension of only words and phrases), while the remaining 14 were people who originally came from other communities and who may comprehend, but rarely speak, Sm'algyax or who were otherwise difficult to classify.

2. Conditions of Contact

The Coast Tsimshian village communities have been undergoing a change from the habitual use of Sm'algyax to that of English. Since white contact, English has been the language used in business transactions, religion, education, and in dealings with government authorities and the Department of Indian Affairs. While Sm-'algyax is still used extensively in the fishing industry, particularly in radio communications concerning location, fishing conditions, etc., it is otherwise restricted to use in homes, informal gatherings, and native cultural events, such as feasts. Historically, the policy of the government, and particularly the schools, has been to 'discourage' the use of Sm'algyax and to label it as having 'lower prestige' and 'less social value' than English. Indeed, until the early 1960's students were punished for speaking Sm'algyax on school grounds, irrespective of whether it was in the classroom or on the playground at recess. (For a fuller discussion of the suppression of native languages by

the schools see Levine and Cooper (1976)).

These same reasons that have led the younger age groups to shift predominantly to English use have also compelled the older age groups to learn English. This has led to the present situation of a complete speaking command of both languages among the older age groups varying to almost a complete lack of speaking ability in Sm'algyax among the younger age groups. The shift has been gradual and covers several generations. The form of the shift has generally been that the children learn English most rapidly and in the early period it is they who switch back to Sm'algyax in communication with their elders. A generation later, the grandchildren often speak only English, while perphaps understanding Sm'algyax, and it is the parents and grandparents who must switch languages in deference to them.

Whether the shift from Sm'algyax to English will be total with a lingering knowledge of the native language or whether there will be continuing bilingualism is an open question. There is now an increased sense of 'language loyalty' among many of the Tsimshian people and a bilingual-bicultural program is being developed in the schools. Because the villages are geographically isolated, bilingualism may continue, but the pressures from the functional use of English for

most interactions with the outside white culture (e.g. business, education, government) are very powerful.

Bilingualism in the Coast Tsimshian villages has led, as it often does, to 'interference phenomena' both in the English and Sm'algyax langauges. As a result of language contact, there are departures from the norms of either language. These departures occur in the speech of bilinguals as a consequence of their familiarity with more than one language. For example, in Sm'algyax some lexical items which are of English origin are used interchangably with Sm'algyax terms: beed 'bed' instead of ha'linook, boot 'boat' instead of xasoo 'boat, canoe'. As the term 'interference' implies, variation and changes in the patterns of a language result from the introduction of foreign elements into the highly structured domains of a language, from the phonemic system to the morphology and syntax, as well as the lexicon.

This paper examines the English dialect spoken in the Canadian Coast Tsimshian communities which has come about through the contact with Sm'algyax. Here, many of the interference phenomena which, having frequently occurred in the speech of bilinguals, have become habitualized and established as the grammatical norm for spoken English. Their use is no longer dependent on

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bilingualism. Now, when a predominantly monolingual child learning English uses a form of Sm'algyax origin it is because they have heard it used by others in English utterances. The result has been the development of a particular dialect of English, many features of which can be traced to language interference between Sm'algyax and English.

3. Areas of Dialect Differences

3.1 Phonemic

There are two characteristics which distinguish the sound system of the Tsimshian English dialect (hence TsE): an underdifferention of vowel lengthening and an underdifferentiation of consonants. In English, a vowel is phonetically longer before a voiced consonant than before a voiceless one - bead [bi:d], beat [bit], and bag [bæ:g], back [bæk]. These differences are never phonemic, though, as the length is entirely due to the consonantal environment. In Sm'algyax, however, differences in vowel length are phonemic - aap [æ:p] 'father', ap [æp] 'bee', and iis [i:s] 'yeast', is [is] 'smell like'. Now, in TsE, vowels are often long before a voiceless consonant - beat [bi:t] and back [bæ:k] - as well as before voiced consonants. Thus, speakers of TsE make less distinctions between
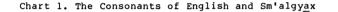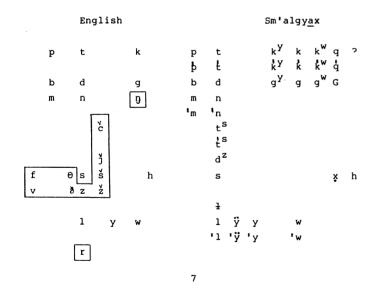
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long and short vowels than do speakers of Standard English. This overuse or underdifferentiation of vowel lengthening originally derives from the imposition of phonemic distinctions from Sm'algyax on the sounds of English.

Among the consonants, TsE uses some consonants from Sm'algyax for English sounds which do not occur in Sm'algyax. To illustrate, the chart below lists the consonantal phonemes for each language (the proof of phonemicization is dispensed with).

Chart 1. The Consonants of English and Sm'algyax

English

p	t		k
b	d		g
m	n		ŋ

| f | θ | s | š̌ |
| v | ð | z | ž̌ |

| | l | y | w |
| | | r | |

Sm'algyax

p	t	k^y	k	k^w	q	ʔ
ᵽ	ṭ	ḳ^y	ḳ	ḳ^w	q̇	
b	d	g^y	g	g^w	G	
m	n					
'm	'n					
t^s						
ṭ^s						
d^z						
s				x̣	h	
ł						
l	ÿ	y		w		
'l	'ÿ	'y		'w		

Boxed in are those phonemes in English which have no counterpart in Sm'algyax: f, v, θ, ð, z, r, č, ǰ, š, ž, and ŋ.

In each of the cases where an English phoneme has no Sm'algyax conterpart there are examples in TsE where the substitution of a (more familiar) phoneme from Sm'-algyax has taken place:

(1) The labial fricatives /f/ and /v/ are sometimes realized as the labial stop [b] - [blæŋk] 'Frank" and [baylət] 'Violet'. This subsitution is much more frequent in names than elsewhere.

(2) The interdental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ often occur as the alveolar stops [t] and [d], respectively - [də] 'the' and [nortlənd] 'northland'.

(3) The voiced fricative /z/ is sometimes devoiced, [s] - [pi:s] 'peas' and [disayn] 'design'.

(4) The liquid /r/ is frequently realized as the lateral liquid [l] - [məli] 'Mary' and [lut] 'Ruth' - or deleted - [mætə] 'Martha'. This substitution is also much more frequent in names than elsewhere.

(5) The two affricates /č/ and /ǰ/ are generally pronounced as [t^s] and [d^z], respectively - [t^{s}Ikṇ] 'chicken' and [d^{z}i:n] 'Jean'.

(6) The alveopalatal fricative /š/ is almost always pronounced as [s] - [fIs] 'fish' and [su] 'shoe'.

(7) The voiced alveopalatal fricative /ž/ some-
times occurs as [s] - [vIsn] 'vision' and [mesž] 'mea-
sure'.

(8) The velar nasal /ŋ/ generally is realized as
[ŋ], but occasionally it is realized as [n] - [ɵIŋkIn]
'thinking'. This substitution generally occurs at a syl-
lable boundary.

In terms of the form of the substitution the fol-
lowing generalization can be made: The manner of artic-
ulation is primary over the place of articulation.
That is, a change in the place of articulation seems to
be the preferred route of substitution, (5) - (8). In
changes in manner of articulation, (1), (2) and (4),
certain structural factors seem to have also contribut-
ed to the form of the substitution. In (1) and (2) the
only conceivable change in just place of articulation
would be to [s], but the substitution of [s] in these
cases would cause the loss of the phonemic distinction
between /f,v/ and /ɵ,ð/ and [s] is also the substitute
for /š,ž/. In (4), [l] is the natural substitution
since it is the only other liquid.

The extent and frequency of a given substitution
is dependent on the speaker as well as on the social
setting of the speech act. The few speakers who nearly
always make the substitutions appear to be using their

'hypercorrected' TsE as a means of explicitly showing a
strong identity with the village and with being Tsim-
shian. For the majority of speakers, however, the ex-
tent and frequency of occurrence for a particular sub-
stitution is as outlined in (1) - (8) above. Through
education, exposure to mass media, and travel out of
the villages, many of the speakers of TsE also command
a more standard dialect of English. For these speakers
the TsE dialect is used only in informal, village or
family settings (i.e. settings where Sm'algyax would
traditionally be spoken).

The reasons for the extent and frequency of a
given substitution are not always clear, but the fol-
lowing speculations can be made. The low occurrence of
the substitutions in (3) and (8) may be due to the ease
of learning the articulation of the English phoneme.
In (3), voicing is contrastive in a number of cases in
Sm'algyax (e.g. /t,d/ and /p,b/) and Sm'algyax also
contains the affricate /dᶻ/ which is the sequence of
[d] + [z]. In (8), the learner of English does not
need to master a new point of articulation, since Sm-
'algyax has a preponderance of velar stops (e.g. un-
voiced and voiced, labialized, palatalized, and voice-
less ejectives). The general frequency of occurrence
for the variants in (5) can be attributed to the nature

of the substitution. Since English does not contain
the phonemes $/t^s/$ and $/d^z/$, the substitution creates a
'foreign accent', but no 'confusion'. Finally, the al-
most total occurrence of the substitution in (6) ap-
pears to result from hypercorrection. A very prominent
distinction between Sm'algyax as spoken in Alaska and
in Canada is the use of [š]. For Alaskan Sm'algyax
speakers, [š] is a free variant of [s], whereas Canad-
ian Sm'algyax speakers are very careful to use only [s]
to the point of hypercorrecting in their dialect of
English.

In the above discussion the distinguishing fea-
tures of underdifferentation of vowel lengthening and
underdifferentiation of consonants in the Tsimshian
dialect were shown to have originally resulted from the
interference of Sm'algyax with Enlgish. For the mono-
lingual Sm'algyax speakers learning English and the bi-
linguals, a partial identification of the English pho-
nemic system with the Sm'algyax system is a reduction
of their linguistic burden. And it is these natural
identifications which eventually became habitualized
and caused a change in the English dialect spoken in
the Coast Tsimshian communities.

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3.2 Grammatical

There are a number of grammatical characteristics
which distinguish TsE. Among them, several can also be
attributed to habitualized grammatical interference be-
tween Sm'algyax and English. The first example illu-
strates the neglect or confusion of a gender and number
distinction in English which has no analogue in Sm'al-
gyax.   In English, pronouns are marked for number
(singular versus plural) in the first and second per-
sons and for gender (masculine, feminine and neuter) in
the third person singular. However, in Sm'algyax there
is no gender distinction and in dependent pronominal
forms there is no number distinction in the third per-
son (e.g. Yagwa liimit. yagwa 'present tense', liimi-
'sing', -t '3rd person' 'He/she/it is singing' or 'They
are singing'). Because of the interference of Sm'al-
gyax with English, third person pronouns in English are
often misused or confused. The misuse or confusion oc-
curs most frequently among the older people, who are
speakers of Sm'algyax, and less among the younger peo-
ple, who usually only speak English. Because of this,
the confusion of pronoun may still be interference of
Sm'algyax with English, rather than a habilualized
characteristic of a special dialect. Since the intend-
ed meaning is usually understandable from the context

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of the discourse, the confusion of pronouns does not cause problems in communication and is, thus, tolerated.

The next case of grammatical interference involves the use of a Sm'algyax morpheme in spoken English. In Sm'algyax, which is VSO, the marker of tense-aspect occurs in sentence-initial position: TENSE-ASPECT VERB SUBJECT OBJECT. One of the tense morphemes dm 'future and progressive', seems to have been adapted into TsE. In this English dialect, we find sentences such as Them Mildred is drinking coffee. 'Mildred is drinking coffee' where them is pronounced with an initial [ð] or [d]. This use of them does not affect the tense/aspect of the sentence. Instead it appears to be part of the noun phrase since it can only occur with proper nouns. In Hartley Bay, them, like the tense marker dm, can only occur in sentence-initial position, whereas in Kitkatla the occurrence of them has been generalized so that it is also found in non-initial positions: Beatrice is by them JoAnne's. 'Beatrice is at JoAnne's house'. The frequency of occurrence for them+proper noun again corresponds to the speaking ability in Sm'algyax - young non-Sm'algyax speakers frequently use this construction whereas the adult Sm'algyax speakers do not. It appears that for the younger

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non-Sm'algyax speakers the English pronoun them has become associated with the Sm'algyax tense marker dm and that, with respect to word order, in Hartley Bay at least, it behaves syntactically like the Sm'algyax particle. This association may have been facilitated by the frequent substitution of [d] for /ð/ in TsE. The non-occurrence of them+proper noun in the English speech of Sm'algyax speakers also makes a certain sense. The Sm'algyax speakers would not confuse a word that they do know (dm) with English, while non-speakers might do so.

The spatial categories of prepositions in TsE are also modeled after Sm'algyax. In TsE, prepositons frequently have different locational denotations than they do in most English dialects. For example, Jack is on the table. means that Jack is 'at' the table, but not 'on' it, in the most natural reading; while Jack is over Johnny's. and Jack is by Johnny's. means that Jack is 'at' or, more specifically, 'inside' Johnny's house. Although more work needs to be done to fully understand the spatial categories of Sm'algyax prepositions, it appears that there has been at least a partial identification of the prepostions in English with the locational categories in Sm'algyax.

The next case of interference to be examined is

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intonation. Inasmuch as it will be a long time before there is a systematic description of the modulation patterns in Sm'algyax and TsE, it is too early to expect exact statements of the impact of Sm'algyax on English in this domain. However, there is a very clear 'foreign accent' in TsE, which the following example illustrates. In TsE, declarative sentences frequently have a slightly rising intonation rather than a falling one. It seems to be used not only to 'soften' the 'decisiveness' of a statement or to indicate that a statement has a potential of being discussed, but also in more 'factual' statements such as in reporting the events of the day. This intonation pattern may possibly be due to the competitiveness in the Tsimshian culture and the extraordinary value that is associated with correctness in the Tsimshian culture. For example, "traditionally, there is a formal designation of 'noble's spokesman' who presents addresses at feasts for a noble so that the noble's status will not be risked by slips of the tongue or lapses in form" (Seguin 1979b, 8-9). The rising intonation pattern of declarative sentences in TsE, then, may be viewed as a subtle way of leaving oneself open to an ensuing discussion or difference of opinion without having it look so much like a correction or loss of face.

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The last example which will be discussed in this section does not seem to be related to habitualized interference between Sm'algyax and English. In the possessive construction, possession is marked by the use of own as well as the genitive marker on the possessor: my own fishing pole, Herbie's own book, and Whose own is this? 'Whose is this?' This redundant possessive marking appears to have evolved from an overgeneralization of the emphatic or contrastive use of own in the possessive construction: I have my (very) own fishing pole. and Herbie's own book is at home, so he borrowed mine. where own is stressed.

3.3 Lexical

Lexical interference, or borrowing, is by far the most common and frequent type of interference in situations of language contact. In this respect TsE is not an exception. The most frequent borrowings in this dialect occur in those areas in which various semantic distinctions are insufficiently differentiated in the existing English lexicon and the use of readymade distinctions from Sm'algyax is more economical than coining new descriptive words. For example, names for indigenous foods are generally borrowed — ɬioon 'a type of baked biscuit' and adzamanaay 'fried bread'. Also

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names for symbolically important ideas are generally borrowed - naxnox 'supernatural being'.

Sm'algyax terms are also often borrowed to describe various emotional states such as embarrassment or shame (e.g. I am dzak to talk about it. 'I am embarrassed/shy to talk about it'). It is not clear why Sm'algyax terms are frequently used in this type of situation. Perhaps, it is because the Sm'algyax lexical items are felt to better 'describe' the feeling or maybe their use is felt to somehow 'lessen' pejorative feelings toward being in the particular emotional state.

In addition to the lexical interference from Sm'algyax, there are two idioms that are specific to TsE. Neither of them appears to have developed from Sm'algyax influence. The first involves an idiomatic use of the verb send. Sentences such as I am sent. frequently occur, meaning 'I'm sent on an errand', 'Someone sent me here on an errand'. The second concerns a language's ever-present need for euphemisms. In TsE, the verb hum refers to using the bathroom rather than a manner of singing with the lips closed: I am going to go hum. M. Seguin (pc) and J. Powell (pc) have suggested that this usage comes from the Chinook jargon word humm which means "any decided odor either

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good or bad, but more commonly used to mean a stench or 'bad stink.' The skunk is called "Humm-opoots" or literally, "Stinks-his-tail",... (Philipps 1913, 32).

3.4 Summary

The preceding sections have demonstrated that many of the distinctive characteristics of TsE are due to habitualized language interference resulting from English-Sm'algyax contact. The extent of the interference is governed by two opposing factors - stimuli and resistance - which can be structural or non-structural. In principle, structural stimuli occur at any point of difference between the two systems while requirements of intelligibility and the stability of the two languages are factors in structural resistance. But, as Section 3.2 illustrated, the total impact of Sm'algyax on English can not be accounted for strictly in structural terms. Various aspects of the Tsimshian culture have also left distinctive traces on the English dialect.

The following chart summarizes the differences in TsE and the stimuli which facilitated the change. As the last column indicates, not all of the changes can be attributed to language interference.

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Chart 2. Summary of the Differences
in the Tsimshian English Dialect

| Form of Difference | Sm'algyax Stimuli | | Other Stimuli |
	Structural	Cultural	
Phonemic			
Underdifferentia-tion of vowel lengthening	Phonemic dis-tinction only in Sm'algyax		
Overdifferentia-tion of consonants	Absence of cor-responding con-sonants in Sm'al-gyax		
Grammatical			
Confusion of gen-der and number in 3rd per pronouns	Absence of cor-responding dis-tinction in Sm'al-gyax		
Use of dm as them	association of /ð/ with [d]		
Change in spatial categories of prepositions	different cate-gories in Sm'al-gyax		
Change in intona-tion patterns		competitiveness of Ts. culture	
Overgeneralization of own in possessive			?
Lexical			
borrowing	need to match distinctions in Sm'algyax		
idioms: send			?
hum			need for euphemisms

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4. Conclusions

4. Conclusions

In this paper, two aspects of the general phen-omena of language interference have been considered: the changes in the Tsimshian English dialect due to ha-bitualized interference and the particular stimuli ac-counting for the process of interference. From this study, a number of conclusions can be made. First, it has been demonstrated that the processes of interfer-ence and language shift are interconnected. The Tsim-shian village communities have undergone a shift from the predominant use of Sm'algyax to that of English. However, it has been shown that the language shift does not exclude interference in the direction of the 'win-ning language' - English. In this connection, it has also been shown that the interference affects all areas of the language, not just particular lexical items. Second, this study has shown that certain types of in-terference are due to linguistic stimuli while other types are attributable to cultural stimuli. Finally, this investigation of TsE serves as a case study of the types of interference that are habitualized and the socio-cultural setting under which habitualization oc-curs.

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