

Linguistic diversity, Language Contact and Areal Typology

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This section brings together ideas and opinions about contact-induced language change. Typological atlases such as the World Atlas of Language Structures (WALS.info) and the Atlas of Pidgin and Creole Language Structures (APiCS-online.info) have triggered increased attention for areal phenomena in language contact and contact languages. The new GRAMBANK site (grambank.cld.org) makes even more data available. Such databases enable researchers to map language influences across language borders. New computational techniques are available to work with large databases.

In typical linguistic area, a range of common features can be identified (e.g. the Balkan, India, Central America) across language families, but even the most characteristic features rarely coincide with the boundaries of the defined area. Why is that?

Properties of language families can be studied around their borders in order to investigate contact phenomena. Languages located far away from the center of the family may both more conservative and more innovative around the boundaries, and one can wonder why. Some areal phenomena are found on both sides of geographical barriers such as mountain ranges, bodies of water and deserts.

An increasing number of studies identify more properties that creole languages have in common, more than continuities from the lexifiers or influences from the supposed substrates. Explanations for the similarities range from continuity from undocumented dialects of the lexifier, cognitive unity of humans, general typological similarities of the substrate languages around the world to the presence of “scattered Sprachbund” areas even across oceans. If creoles indeed have more in common with each other than with other natural languages, why would that be the case?

Does language contact increase or decrease diversity? Can we identify different contact phenomena in areas of widespread bilingualism compared to areas of massive language shift?

For this section, we invite contributions relating to diversity, language contact and areal typology, including for contact languages pidgins, creoles and mixed languages.