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Special and mundane at the same time: Relevance of contact data for usage-based linguistics

In much of my work I have been attempting to account for language contact data in a framework that is loosely based on the usage-based approach to linguistic theory formation that has been the cornerstone of much of what is often referred to as 'Cognitive Linguistics'. That has culminated in three recent papers that explore the usefulness of the usage-based approach for language change, borrowing, and codeswitching, respectively (Backus 2014a, 2014b, 2015). Similarly, in various recent empirical projects on Turkish-Dutch contact in the Netherlands, a usage-based approach has informed the design of the study and the way in which results were interpreted. However, while the value of a usage-based account of contact data is reasonably well established, the traffic has rarely been the other way. There are various other efforts like mine, reported on in conferences and journals on contact linguistics, but this work seems to have barely made an impact on Cognitive Linguistics. In this presentation, I will identify some likely conceptual and methodological reasons for this, and explore some possibilities for better integration of contact data into the usage-based paradigm. Illustration will come from some of the recent studies I was involved in as a supervisor or co-researcher. Specifically, I will reinterpret their results against the background of the issue described above. Rather than just demonstrating how the results can be accounted for in a usage-based framework, I will suggest some take-home messages the results could have for usage-based linguistics, as well as point out some current limitations that make this bidirectional usefulness difficult to achieve.

References

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