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INSTITUT FÜR SLAVISTIK

Einladung zum Gastvortrag

# Towards a functionalist theory of language contact

With special reference to Romani, and with implications  
for the architecture of the language faculty

**Yaron Matras, Aston Institute for Forensic Linguistics  
and University of Haifa**

Contact-induced language change and the 'borrowing' of structural categories in particular has commonly been linked to perceived structural 'gaps' and the 'prestige' of the donor or model language. Modern attempts to theorise the process of structural borrowing have addressed such aspects as the degree of intensity of cultural contacts (Thomason & Kaufman 1988), the pre-determined hierarchical relationship between the languages involved and its impact on the combination of categories and their position in the bilingual speech production process (Myers-Scotton 2002), and contact as a trigger of universal process of grammaticalisation (Heine & Kuteva 2005), among others. In Matras (2009/2020) I introduced a pragmatic-functional model of language contact that places the emphasis on the goal-oriented management of the multilingual repertoire in communicative interaction, and the re-configuration of routines, perceived analytically from a 'system' point of view as language change. Pivotal for such repertoire management is the link between task-oriented production of speech and the cognitive information-processing tasks that are triggered by distinct functional categories.

In this presentation I draw on data from Romani to illustrate the hierarchical nature of contact-induced change in structural categories. Building on earlier work (Elšík & Matras 2006, Matras & Adamou 2020, and more) I review patterns in a large-scale sample of Romani dialects in contact with a variety of different languages under very similar sociolinguistic and socio-historical conditions. For an explanatory account of these hierarchies I then turn to data from bilingual speech and the role of the 'executive control' in selecting and inhibiting material from the multilingual repertoire. I conclude with the hypothesis that language contact can offer insights into the architecture of the language faculty itself, and so by extension into its archaeology, including its evolutionary pathways.

y.matras@aston.ac.uk

**Donnerstag, 23. Juni 2022,  
16.15 Uhr, Ü35-01043(E)**

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Organisation:  
PD Dr. Anna-Maria Sonnemann  
Vertreterin der Juniorprofessur für Slavische  
Sprachwissenschaft mit dem Schwerpunkt  
Westslavistik