

Lia Lim and Umberto Ansaldo, *Languages in Contact*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. xiv + 237 pp. ISBN 978 0 521 14925 9.

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The purport of this volume is short: “Contact begets outcomes” (xi). While one might assume the upshot implied is purely linguistic and is intended “for students and scholars not only of creole studies but also of World Englishes, language endangerment, language and globalisation, language and communication, and policy and education” (x), the product is much more. Individual takes on academic endeavours often strive and result in original outcomes; Lim and Ansaldo’s hyper modern *Languages in Contact* is no exception.

It is refreshing that Lim and Ansaldo’s project is less a textbook on creolistics, of which the discipline does not need another instalment, and rather a summation of the field. It is a critical distillation of significant issues and debates in creole studies integrated within a more modern sociolinguistics involving research into multilingualism, code switching, language shift, and language and globalisation. That the authors are both based in Hong Kong, an apposite global epicentre of exchange and communication for observing such matters, makes their account all the more reliable and pertinent. The recent founding and editorship by the authors of the journal *Language Ecology* exists as a relevant action in relation to *Languages in Contact*; the study of the emplacement of languages, a release from many of the stringencies of more conservative creole language studies, and a view to a hopeful future of and for sociolinguistics, linguistic ecology, and ecolinguistics is what is tendered with this book.

Based in a decade and a half of personal and academic interaction, an interface apparently at odds – “[o]ne had trained as a phonetician and was working on a New English in the World Englishes paradigm. The other was a creolist and typologist specialising in Sinitic varieties” (ix) – the work offers fresh versions on varieties of English, language contact in Asia in typologically diverse languages, and the central issues involved in describing the evolving super diverse and super complex language ecologies of significant regions of the world. Although contact is the driving word in this study, as the authors admit “it might still appear surprising to the reader that it is a mere two chapters that appear to be dedicated to pidgin and creole languages and linguistics, these being the cornerstone of the study of languages in contact, when the majority of books in the field usually devote themselves entirely to them” (ix–x). It is primarily in the other chapters, for example

in the latter chapters 'Contact and ecology', 'Contact and shift', and 'Contact and globalisation', that this work comes into its own and unmoors the promise of a more synthesised and impressive treatise on language contact and cultural change.

There are various themes visible throughout: the study of language contact is integral to linguistics; the speakers of languages are the carriers and influencers of language change; language contact is in part the study of human societies and their histories, cultures, and ideologies; how languages change through contact is a documentable and describable domain and a window into the nature of human nature; understanding language contact and the mechanisms for language change provides several fundamentals for realising more enlightened and just societies. It would be quite an impressive and ambitious enterprise to consider and address all these matters in a 237-page undertaking. While this is not the authors' brief, they do go a fair way to outlining the social, intellectual, and epistemological history of the field of contact linguistics and its application to a more open-minded and evaluative explication of in vogue, largely Asian sociolinguistics.

A theoretical core of thinking and practice in linguistic diversity and linguistic typology, usage based acquisition and language socialisation, and language evolution move away from a universal reliance on structuralism as explananda for much sociolinguistic change. This movement moves toward a conglomerate of 'choice' forms made by speakers within multilingual ecologies. Contact languages are situation specific linguistic solutions; the Asian and global influence in Lim and Ansaldo's positions enlarge the scope of these language-based resolutions. Where much work hitherto on pidgins and creoles and language contact has focused on the Caribbean and findings relevant to plantation and slave environments, the Asian perspective offers a more dynamic and less Eurocentric stance. This enables the authors to present many intricacies of the effect of globalisation and mobility on language contact, and the role of, for example, urban ethnic pluralism, the growth of the Asian middle classes, and hyper consumer culture on the development of modern Asian contact varieties.

It is here that Lim and Ansaldo impressively remove themselves from some of the stodginess of geographical and theoretical foci of creole studies and bring into new light the excitement of the linguistic realm of some of the twenty-first century's most mobile and energetic economies. This prospect is to be both commended and held somewhat with suspicion, mainly because the complexity of contemporary Asian language contact is so vast. Some sections, for example, Chapter 7 'Contact and globalisation', leave the reader expecting or wanting more, especially considering the directive of the book is so intently focused on more contemporary thinking of and in language contact. These matters exist as a possible oversight which might have arisen from the slight pedagogical nature of the work. While it was necessary to offer a solid background into the history of language contact

studies in order to contextualise the work, it is really the new scene – that of a rousing Asia rather than an arguably bygone Caribbean or elsewhere – which provides the right stuff for advancing assessment of the future of language contact studies. One can sniff the animated nature of new Asian languages; they are like taste tests of street food in Hong Kong. Some were given, they were just enough, but much more could have been supplied.

Because of the authors' brief of addressing issues in traditional language contact studies into what are no doubt more vibrant and changing academic environs, they have held themselves back somewhat in presenting a braver and more spirited critique of Asian contact linguistic ecologies. Instead, the reader is continually reminded of some of the more conservative and ongoing debates in creole language studies, many of which are perennial, some personal, and others even driven by partisan prejudice. As a result, some passages are almost apologetic in that there is continual reference to much of the well-known and well-hewn creolistics core rather than what could have been a more courageous venture into the unknown and less explored expanse of social and structural analyses of Asian linguistic ecologies. Call centre communication over the surely-soon-to-be-expired Language Bioprogram Hypothesis; Canto-pop and Asian hip hop rather than creole typology; computer mediated communication and language contact instead of theory on morphological complexity.

That the authors became parents to the child to whom the book is dedicated during the latency of the publication, and that several sections bear the marks of edgy, advanced scholarship in a late modern academy so focused on exchange and mobility, is testament to its personal and intellectual appeal. At several points in the reading, one is certain one is standing on a street corner in modern-day Asia listening to a conversation in one of the varieties described or interacting with some of the technology so important to enable contemporaneous linguistic adaptation. One might understand a little or a lot of such conversations. Whatever the case, linguistic and culinary mixing more often than not leads to spicier outcomes especially on the thoroughfares of contemporary Asia. As such, this is not merely an instructive book; it is at the same time an entertaining read.