

In the language contact literature, linguistic borrowing is discussed linguistically in terms of what gets borrowed (e.g. lexicon, idioms, discourse markers, other structural elements), the linguistic processes by which borrowing occurs (e.g. transfer from L1, calquing, adoption of foreign lexicon, etc.), and ‘universal’ principles governing these processes (e.g. structural compatibility, structural simplification, etc.). Borrowing is also discussed socially. Thomason and Kaufman (1988), for example, argue that social and demographic factors play a definitive role in processes of lexical and structural borrowing: under the right social circumstances, they argue, linguistic constraints may be violated. There is little melding of the two perspectives, however.

This paper addresses the gap in the literature via examination of passive constructions in Papiamentu (Iberian creole; Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao (Dutch Caribbean)). These three islands host a long-term contact situation with Dutch and Spanish (from colonial times) and English (beginning in the 20th century). Based on a diachronic collection of texts (n=171, 1776-2003), sociolinguistic interviews (n=129, ages 18-82, collected in 2003), census data, and ethnographic fieldwork (March to August, 2003), this paper examines the origins and use of three apparently equivalent passivizing verbs in Papiamentu: Dutch-derived wordu ‘become’, Spanish-derived ser ‘to be’, and Spanish-derived keda ‘to keep’. All three forms were borrowed after creolization. Wordu and conjugated forms of ser are used in the passive constructions of Dutch and Spanish respectively. Wordu first appears as a passivizer in written Papiamentu in the middle of the 19th century and is used with some frequency in the 21st century spoken language. In contrast, ser and keda passives are evidenced in the written language beginning in the middle of the 20th century, but occur only once each in the interview data.

I argue that the wordu passive began as an interference feature in the Papiamentu of L1 Dutch speakers, and was later adopted by L1 Papiamentu speakers as a prestige form. Unconjugated ser is analyzed as a calque on the wordu passive consciously introduced by L1 Spanish speakers uncomfortable with the Dutch element in Papiamentu, and unaware of the meaning of wordu in Dutch independent of its use in the passive construction. The keda passive is also a calque on the wordu passive, but this one, I argue, was introduced by L1 Papiamentu speakers bilingual in Spanish. (Spanish queda + PAST PARTICIPLE means ‘become X’.) Linguistic information, sociohistorical information, and statistical analyses supporting these hypotheses are presented and discussed.

These data contribute to the study of language contact through simultaneous evaluation of linguistic and social factors via the kinds of ethnography and statistical analysis typically used by variationists in consideration of monolingual societies. The influences of linguistic structure and social/demographic factors on borrowing are complex, but can be fleshed out with variationist methods.