

Preface & acknowledgements

 <https://doi.org/10.1075/cilt.328.preface>

Pages ix–x of

**Language Contact, Inherited Similarity and Social
Difference: The story of linguistic interaction in the Maya
lowlands**

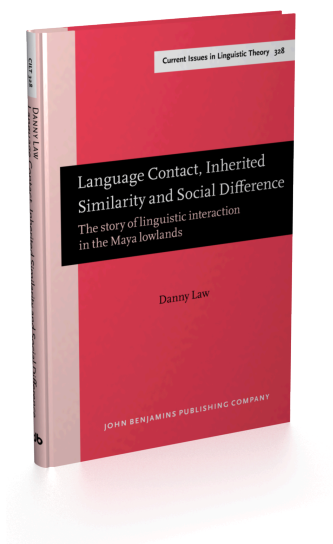
Danny Law

[*Current Issues in Linguistic Theory*, 328] 2014. xi, 206 pp.

© John Benjamins Publishing Company

This electronic file may not be altered in any way. For any reuse of this material written permission should be obtained from the publishers or through the Copyright Clearance Center (for USA: www.copyright.com).

For further information, please contact rights@benjamins.nl or consult our website at benjamins.com/rights



Preface & acknowledgements

This book is a case study of long-term, intensive language contact between more than a dozen genetically related languages spoken in the Maya Lowlands of Guatemala, Southern Mexico and Belize. Lowland Mayan languages display effects of language contact that pervade virtually every facet of these languages. To the contact linguist, Lowland Mayan languages serve as a highly relevant case study of contact among related languages that highlights issues of methods for distinguishing contact-induced similarity from inherited similarity, as well as the effect that inherited similarity has on the processes and outcomes of language contact. The focus of this volume is on the non-lexical effects of language contact among related languages. I detail cases of the massive restructuring of syntactic and semantic organization, the calquing of grammatical patterns, the direct borrowing of inflectional morphology, and even, in some cases, entire morphological paradigms. I argue that the cross-linguistically unusual outcomes of language contact evident in Mayan languages have been facilitated by processes of linguistic change and local ideologies of community identity, both of which drew upon a large body of shared inherited linguistic similarities.

In many ways, the Mayan language family is an ideal linguistic laboratory for investigating contact among related languages. The family is relatively small, consisting of, by most counts, thirty-three different languages, including partial documentation of three now-extinct languages (Chikomuselteke, Cholti, and Classic Mayan, the language of Maya hieroglyphic texts). The family also benefits from linguistic records from the Spanish Colonial period, as early as the 16th century, and hieroglyphic linguistic data going back nearly two millennia. Perhaps even more significantly, high quality descriptive work in recent decades on many of the contemporary Mayan languages has produced a body of comparative grammatical data. While this study has been supplemented by my own fieldwork on seven Mayan languages, a comparative study of this scope has only been possible because of the efforts of a host of descriptive linguists working on specific Mayan languages in recent decades that have produced careful and sophisticated grammatical analyses with sufficient detail to allow a comparison between the several languages of the family. The linguistic research team OKMA (Oxlajuuj Keej Maya' Ajtz'iib'), unfortunately no longer in operation, deserves particular acknowledgment for producing a series of grammars of Mayan languages that redefined the

standards for adequate description of Mayan languages and served as a model for several subsequent grammars. As more and better descriptive materials are produced, it is my hope that the story of language contact that I introduce here will be expanded and enriched.

This book could not have happened without essential financial support from a Jacob Javits Doctoral Fellowship from the U.S. Department of Education and a Postdoctoral Research Fellowship in Anthropology from Vanderbilt University, which provided both funds for field research and time to write. Throughout the lengthy process of researching, writing and revising this work, I have benefitted enormously from the energy and expertise of numerous people. Nora England, John Robertson, Pattie Epps, Juan Jesus Vázquez Álvarez, Stephen Houston, David Stuart, Bill Hanks, Sergio Romero, Kerry Hull, Brian Stross, María Luz García, Eric Campbell and many others provided feedback on specific aspects of this project and general collegial support and encouragement. I am grateful to Rusty Barrett, Judith Maxwell, E. Wyn Roberts and an anonymous reviewer appointed by the series editor, all of whom read some or all of an early version of this book and provided substantive and thoughtful comments that have greatly improved the final product. At John Benjamins, I would particularly like to thank Anke de Looper, who encouraged me to submit my manuscript and skillfully coaxed it through the production process, and E.F.K. Koerner, who recommended a rough and unwieldy manuscript for publication and patiently helped to raise that manuscript to the high standards he has established and maintained for the CILT series. Finally, my gratitude, as always, goes out to my wife, Editt, and our four children, Jarom, Eli, Lucas and Ariana, who make it all worthwhile.

Austin, Texas, November 2013

Danny Law