Media Lengua, Michif, and Caló: a comparative study between mixed languages

In the study of pidgins, creoles, and mixed languages many experts have suggested and defended different hypotheses and theories about their genesis (Bakker & Van der Voort, 1991; Comrie, 2011; González Caballero, 1998; Matras, Bakker & Kyuchukov, 1997; Muysken, 1977; 1981; 1997; Neuhaus, 2010; Wolfart, 2010). However, the processes involved in the emergence of pidgins and creoles do not seem to contribute to the formation of mixed languages. In mixed languages speakers have access to the languages involved in the creation (Comrie, 2011) and there is a language that provides the grammatical structure while there is another that contributes with lexicon which undergoes processes such as relexification and reduplication. As well, they might be created as the result of language borrowing or linguistic interference through shift (Thomason and Kaufman, 1988). The reasons why mixed languages emerged are also distinct: they appeared not because of communication needs, but due to cultural and expressive reasons (Muysken, 1981; 1997).

The present paper analyzes three different morphosyntactic features (adjective and noun agreement, negation patterns, and harmonization of verbal conjugations) in three mixed languages: Media Lengua, Michif, and Spanish Caló. Media Lengua (mixture of Ecuadorian Spanish and Quechua), Michif (mixture of Cree and French or English), and Spanish Caló (mixture of Peninsular Spanish and Romani) have emerged in different contexts and due to different reasons. Nevertheless, they show similar patterns when analyzing their grammar systems despite unique origins. For example, concerning adjective and noun agreement in gender, in Media Lengua it seems to depend on the noun that the adjective agrees with; the ending of the noun (masculine or feminine ending). In Caló, gender and number agreement with the noun behaves in the same way as in Spanish. On the other hand, adjective and noun gender agreement does not always occur in Michif. However, it seems that the simplification of verbs and conjugations is a generalized characteristic of mixed languages.

The origin, evolution, and differences between these specific morphosyntactic patterns among these three mixed languages will be discussed. Whether mixed languages are the result of language borrowing

or linguistic interference through shift is the question that remains unanswered and which will be approached.

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