The aim of this book is to demonstrate that all language contact phenomena are governed by the same set of underlying principles. The theoretical framework which Carol Myers-Scotton employs is the Matrix Language Frame model (MLF), which was first proposed in Myers-Scotton (1993a/1997). Central to the MLF is the distinction between Matrix Language and Embedded Language; this develops the idea of asymmetry between participating languages prevalent in the literature on codeswitching (cf. Sridhar and Sridhar 1980, Joshi 1985, Bokamba 1988) whilst treating the Matrix and Embedded Languages as abstract linguistic systems rather than actual languages. It is the Matrix Language which contributes structure (morpheme order) and “critical system morphemes,” that is, “system morphemes which have grammatical relations external to their head constituent (i.e. which participate in the sentence’s thematic role grid)” (p. 59). The Embedded Language contributes other morphemes, most notably content words.

The development of the MLF was motivated by codeswitching data (chapters 3 and 4), but in this volume Myers-Scotton applies the MLF to language phenomena. In chapter 5 she discusses convergence (whereby one language or variety adopts certain features of another language or variety) and attrition (whereby a language or variety loses certain grammatical distinctions), and in chapter 6 she discusses lexical borrowing, creole formation, and split or mixed languages (in which the lexicon is derived primarily from one source and the morphosyntactic frame from another).

Myers-Scotton restricts her analysis to variation within the simple clause, thereby intentionally excluding the study of inter-sentential codeswitching from her framework (the CP in the generative framework which she adopts); in classic codeswitching the Matrix Language cannot change within a single simple clause. Her handling of the codeswitching data is, on the whole, excellent, as one would expect from one of the acknowledged experts in this field (cf. Myers-Scotton 1993b), but her treatment of other contact phenomena is less sure and so invites more comment in this review.

The MLF is supported by two auxiliary theories: the 4-M model and the Abstract Level model. The 4-M model elaborates the distinction between content and system morphemes, which is the basic opposition in the 4-M model, by distinguishing types of morphemes in terms of three
binary features. The first is [+/-conceptually activated]; morphemes that have the feature [+conceptually activated] include “content morphemes” which have the feature [+thematic role assigner/receiver], and “early system morphemes” which are [−thematic role assigner/receiver]. Early system morphemes in English include determiners, plural –s, and satellites in phrasal verbs (e.g. at in look at). Morphemes that are [–conceptually activated] are differentiated as [+/-outside of the maximal projection of the head], with “bridge late system morphemes” being [−outside] and “outsider late system morphemes” (also referred to as “late outsider system morphemes” on p. 88) being [+outside]. Bridge late system morphemes connect content morphemes without reference to the properties of a head, whereas outsider late system morphemes require co-indexing with an element outside their immediate maximal projection. Examples of bridge late system morphemes in English include possessive of and –s; outsider late system morphemes include subject-verb agreement and most case marking elements.

Unfortunately, there is very little explanation of what these features actually mean and how one should go about identifying a particular morpheme according to them. The criteria according to which the different kinds of system morphemes are distinguished are fairly abstract; even word order can be characterized as an early-system morpheme in certain circumstances (p. 211). In addition, the presentation of the 4-M model is split between chapters 1 and 3 making it particularly difficult to follow (chapter 2 discusses the social and psychological motivations for codeswitching). For example, lemmas are central to the definitions of the different types of morphemes in chapter 1:

First, content morphemes are the only morphemes whose lemmas link them directly to speakers’ intentions. Speakers’ intentions activate language-specific semantic/pragmatic feature bundles that underlie the conceptual information that content morphemes will convey. In turn, these bundles point to lemmas in the mental lexicon. The lemmas underlying content morphemes are directly elected and their content is salient at the level of the mental lexicon. (pp. 17–18)

And so on. Unfortunately, the reader has to wait until p. 69 to learn that “a lemma is an abstract entry in the mental lexicon that can and does trigger language-specific morphosyntactic processes.” Nonetheless, the 4-M model leads to some quite specific and potentially falsifiable predictions, such as the Early System Morpheme Hypothesis: “Only early system morphemes may be doubled in classic codeswitching” (p. 92), and the claim that all outsider late system morphemes in classic codeswitching must be from the Matrix Language (this is a rewording of the System Morpheme Principal of Myers-Scotton 1993a/1997).

The second auxiliary theory underpinning the MLF is the Abstract Level model. This posits three levels of abstract grammatical structure in any lexical item: (1) lexical-conceptual structure (semantic/pragmatic features); (2) predicate-argument structure (relations between thematic role assigners and the arguments they map onto phrase-structure units); (3) morphological realization patterns (including word order). Myers-Scotton claims that an Embedded Language morpheme can only occur if there is “sufficient congruence” between it and its Matrix Language counterpart “at all three levels of abstract grammatical structure” (p. 97). This is not to say that codeswitching (and borrowing etc.) can only occur at positions where there is equivalence (that is, total congruence) between Matrix and Embedded Language categories (pace Poplack 1980,
Kazadi-Mukenge 1985); indeed, one of the main applications of the Abstract Level model is that in cases of convergence and attrition, lexical-conceptual structure in lexemes from the language undergoing convergence or attrition is modified one level at a time. Specifically, lexical-conceptual structure is more susceptible to change than the level of morphological realization patterns, which in turn is more likely to change than the level of predicate-argument structure.

Continuing with the discussion of convergence and attrition, some of Myers-Scotton’s arguments for the notion of substitution rather than loss as a mechanism in language attrition are not wholly convincing either. For example, when the language of a speaker or speech community changes (under the influence of language contact) from having a rich case system (i.e. a system with many distinct surface realizations of case marking) to a system with reduced case marking, Myers-Scotton describes this as substitution rather than loss. She argues that speakers retain an underlying concept of case, such that when a case “slot” is filled by another form (say, an accusative instead of a dative form), this is an instance of substitution (of accusative for dative) rather than of loss (of dative case marking). This, she argues, is because case assignment is no longer governed by the grammatical structure of the language undergoing attrition, but by the other language—presumably a case of the substitution of one Matrix Language (the language which contributes structure and critical system morphemes) for another in the domain of case marking. However, the fact remains that a distinction has been lost, even if the “slot” in which case is marked remains. One of the problems with Myers-Scotton’s presentation is that she only cites examples in which the language undergoing attrition has a rich case system (e.g. Russian or German) and the dominant (or “waxing”) language (English) has fewer overt case distinctions. Her argument that such changes involve substitution rather than loss would have been more convincing if she could have shown evidence of changes from English-like systems to systems with richer case marking. However, her basic point, that speakers undergoing language attrition never dispense with grammar, is well made; all utterances, however “mixed” or showing evidence of language attrition, conform to a grammatical system based on one or both of the participating languages.

Perhaps the most interesting application of the MLF model is to the study of borrowing, split (mixed) languages and creole formation (chapter 6). These phenomena are all analysed using the 4-M model, and in particular the distinction between content and system morphemes. Myers-Scotton distinguishes between lexical borrowing (which involves content morphemes) and the adoption of system morphemes, which is characteristic of convergence rather than borrowing proper. In contrast, split languages are characterized by the occurrence of late system morphemes from the ‘old’ Embedded Language (p. 248). (The term “split” refers to the split between the lexicon and the morphosyntactic frame in such languages.) Split languages, she argues, are the result of incomplete Matrix Language turnover (i.e. language shift from one Matrix Language to another). Since the turnover can fossilize at different stages, split languages show a variety of divisions between the lexicon and the morphosyntactic frame (p. 249). This is illustrated by three case studies: Michif (mixing a largely French lexicon and Cree grammar), Mendyj Aleut (or Copper Island Aleut, which mixes Aleut and Russian), and Ma’a (or Mbugu, mixing a largely Cushitic lexicon and Bantu grammar). Because these case studies are all fairly brief, there are too few examples for the reader to evaluate Myers-Scotton’s claims without referring to primary sources, and so a lot is left to trust. However, when one knows a little of the language families involved, it is clear that the data has not always been handled accurately, as in the following
examples from Ma’a. Ma’a has two “registers”: so-called “Inner Ma’a” and so-called “Normal Ma’a” or Mbugu (Mous 1994). The problematic examples are cited on p. 267: (1a) is Inner Ma’a and (1b) is Normal Ma’a.

(1a) áa-pú-ndaté kú’u  
3s-PST-break stick/his  
‘He broke his stick.’

(1b) áa-baha ndatá y-akwé  
3s-PST break CL9-his  
‘He broke his stick.’

The correct gloss should be as follows (note also that pú should be pá and ndaté is a free morpheme):¹

(1a’) áa-pá ndaté kú’u  
3s-PST-break stick his  
‘He broke his stick.’

(1b’) áa-baha ndatá y-akwé  
3s-PST-break stick CL9-his  
‘He broke his stick.’

Myers-Scotton notes that Mous (1994) claims that the grammar of Ma’a (that is, word order and outsider late system morphemes) comes from a Bantu source but that in Inner Ma’a most lexical items (including possessive forms) come from a Cushitic source. This claim is consistent with the revised gloss in (1a’) but not with the example as cited by Myers-Scotton.

Split languages are similar to creoles in that the grammar and lexicon come, broadly speaking, from different sources. However, in the case of creoles, Myers-Scotton proposes that the Matrix Language which supplies the grammar is a composite of various substrate languages (the speakers’ different L1s), with the Embedded Language being the lexifier or superstrate language. In addition, she proposes that “[c]ontent morphemes from the superstrate can be reconfigured as system morphemes to satisfy the requirements of the abstract morphosyntactic creole frame that is based on a composite Matrix Language from the substrates” (p. 283). For example, French petit (‘small’) has been reconfigured as a prefix in Mauritian Creole to satisfy Bantu noun class prefix requirements, where it has become the class 13 (diminutive) prefix ti-.²

Despite the minor problems mentioned above, this is an ambitious and thought-provoking book. It is also very readable. Myers-Scotton states her hypotheses clearly and regularly so that the reader is able to follow her arguments and understand how each part of her discussion contributes to the bigger picture. However, the argumentation is sometimes quite dense in chapters 1 and 3, where the theoretical framework (the MLF model and the two models which support it, the 4M model, and the Abstract Level model) is explained. There appears to be an implicit understanding that the reader is familiar with Myers-Scotton (1993a/1997), and much of the argumentation in the early chapters is devoted to clarifying misconceptions relating to the earlier work. Myers-Scotton is always courteous and nonconfrontational when dealing with her critics and those whose positions she rejects (for example in her discussion of Lefebvre’s (1998) notion of dialect levelling on pp. 290-291). She is also ready to admit her own previous errors.
and omissions (such as the claim in Myers-Scotton (1993a) that the Matrix Language can be identified as the language contributing most morphemes, retracted on p. 61). This, together with the infectious enthusiasm with which Myers-Scotton presents her arguments, makes Contact Linguistics an engaging read.

**Notes**

1 I am grateful to Maarten Mous for confirming these corrections. The examples are referenced to Mous’ 1993 fieldnotes.

2 In fact, class 13 is usually used for plural diminutives with class 12 being used in the singular. Proto-Bantu noun classes have been reconstructed with the class 12 prefix as *ka* and the class 13 prefix as *tu* (hence the Luganda diminutive *akabuzi* 'small kid/goat', which is described on p. 284 as being in class 13, is actually in class 12). It is possible that the phonological resemblance between *ti* and *tu* influenced the development of the Mauritian Creole class 13 prefix *ti*- with the result that *ti*- rather than a reflex of class 12 is used as the default (singular) diminutive prefix.

**References**


