

NINE HYPOTHESES ON CULTURAL INTERFERENCE

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Özet

Bu metin 1978 yılında oluşturmaya başladığım ve o dönemden bu yana yeni araştırmalar ve alanda bu konuda ortaya konulan yeni düşüncelere dayanarak sürekli olarak gözden geçirdiğim kültürel etki (interference) konulu hipotezlerimin gözden geçirilmiş yeni bir versiyonudur. Hipotezlerin temelinde doğrudan atıf yapılmayan yüzlerce araştırma yer almaktadır, bunların arasında benim kültürlerarası ilişkilere ilişkin örnekler üzerinde yaptığım çalışmalar da vardır. İlk fikrim, ki bu fikir halen geçerliliğini korumaktadır, dünyanın mümkün olan her köşesinden toplanacak sayısız örnekle her bir hipotezin sınanmasıdır. Bu proje için bütün dünyadan araştırmacıların işbirliği yapması gerekmektedir; ne yazık ki şu ana kadar bu denli kapsamlı bir işbirliği mümkün olamamıştır.

Hipotezlerin bu versiyonu çalışmalarıyla kültürlerarası ilişkilerin dinamikleri ile ilgilenen herkese esin kaynağı olan Saliha Paker'e ithaf edilmiştir.

Abstract

This is one more revised version of my hypotheses on interference initiated in 1978 and continuously revised since on the basis of new studies, as well as new thinking in the field. The hypotheses are based on hundreds of studies, which however are not quoted directly, as well as on the author's own works on cases of intercultural relations. The original idea was, and still is, to have every hypothesis illustrated with a plethora of examples from all possible parts of the world, a project that requires a world-wide cooperation of scholars, which unfortunately has not been feasible so far.

This version is dedicated to Saliha Paker, whose works have inspired everyone interested in the dynamics of relations between cultures.

Are we in a position to formulate some generalizations, or at least demonstrable regularities, about cultural interference? A large number of works dealing with particular cases of relations between societies and cultures have been produced, but there have been few attempts to use this vast accumulated knowledge for some synchronized analysis. This paper is such an attempt, a reshuffled version of previous endeavors, which the current author initiated back in 1978 for the narrower domain of literary theory and has revised several times since for the general field of culture (Even-Zohar 1978, 1990, 1990a, 2010). As in the previous versions of this sketch, the purpose is not achieving some definitive list of "laws," as it were, but a set of tentative generalities that help make explicit, and consequently testable, what is proposed to be repetitive patterns and regularities.

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I. Contacts and Interferences

Contacts can be defined as relations between cultures, whereby items from a certain culture A are present, i.e., known or acknowledged, in another culture B, and vice versa. If items from a culture A are adopted by Culture B to become part of its reproductive repertoire, then *interference* can be said to have occurred. Interference is thus a procedure emerging in the environment of contacts, one where *transfer* (or otherwise *transmission*) has taken place.

This kind of relations has always been part of the historical existence of human societies. Indeed, most human societies around the globe have come into being, survived and changed thanks to interference. Isolated societies – in as much as they have existed – have encountered, on the other hand, many difficulties, even if they have managed to survive (and many have not). Naturally, a precondition for interference must be some kind of contact – whether direct or indirect – but the opposite is not necessarily true: contacts may occur without generating any interference. Hence, "interference" and "contacts" are distinct processes, definitely interconnected but not overlapping. They may have different histories and at any rate, they need to be dealt with by different sets of questions.

One of the manifestations of contacts is an exchange of goods. Whether unilaterally or multilaterally imported, such goods may become important items in the culture of the importing society. However, only if they are converted to generative models – namely to active components in the domestic repertoire – do they become a clear case of interference. Thus, while human societies may depend on each other's resources for a variety of tasks and purposes, it is only when such resources are domesticated by a culture to be locally (re)produced that we are allowed to speak of interference. Naturally, the "borders" between cases of active contact (i.e. a strong presence of imported goods) and interference are not always clear-cut. Nevertheless, the basic principle here is the separation of the transferred item from the exporting source and its ensuing independence: once the source is no longer needed for the making of the trait (item-of-repertoire) in question, it is justified to consider the case as interference. Once interference has taken place, the question of source/origin is no longer relevant. For the majority of the members of a community, once introduced into their repertoire, the fortune of an item in terms of success or failure becomes a domestic matter.

Different kinds of contacts may create different kinds of interference, depending chiefly on whether contacts are direct or indirect. In the case of direct contacts, a source culture is available to, and accessed by, members of the target culture without intermediaries. For example, in the case of minority groups physically living among majority groups, to be daily exposed to the culture of the majority, interference may be much more powerful than in those cases where the target can avoid the source. On the other hand, in the second type, contacts are intermediated through agencies, such as various kinds of importers. Though in both cases import may be a major channel for actual transfer, it is obvious that when intermediaries are involved, its role as an institutionalized distinct procedure is more indispensable. In such cases, we often deal with a small group of agents who operate as entrepreneurs in and for a target culture. Clearly, massive exposure can significantly support the impact of interference. However, such an exposure *per se* is neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition for interference to take place.

Conditioned by our modern tradition, we tend to think about interrelated societies as well as demarcated entities, mostly distinct ethnic or national, being in possession of well-defined cultural repertoires. This, however, is an unduly restricted view of realities. Interference functions for all sizes and levels of social configurations: families, clans, tribes, "classes", ethnic groups,

geographically organized groups, as well as nations, or groups of nations. There is therefore no need to make a theoretical distinction between so-called intra-systemic and inter-systemic contacts and interferences, although in practice they may be carried out through different procedures, or rather different options within the same procedures.

II. Repetitive Patterns of Interference

Three groups of aspects can tentatively be distinguished:

[1] General principles of interference.

1. Interference is always imminent.
2. Interference is mostly unilateral.
3. Interference may be restricted to certain domains.

[2] Conditions for the emergence and occurrence of interference.

4. Contacts will sooner or later generate interference if no resisting conditions arise.
5. Interference occurs when a system is in need of items unavailable within its own repertoire.
6. A culture becomes a source by prestige.
7. A culture becomes a source by dominance.

[3] Processes and procedures of interference.

8. Interference may take place with only one part of the target culture; it may then proceed to other parts.
9. An appropriated repertoire does not necessarily maintain source culture functions.

1. General Principles of Interference

Hypothesis No. 1. Interference is always imminent.

The ubiquity of interference is not always obvious. Since the channels of actual transfer may not be "visible" to anyone of the parties involved, and since it is often the case that we are confronted with the later, domesticated results of interference rather than with its initial stages, it seems "natural" not to hypothesize interference as a first option for explaining traits in any given case. Yet research has demonstrated that probably all human societies known to us have emerged and developed with interference playing a prominent role in their history. It would be hard to find a culture that emerged without interfering with a more established culture; and no culture could manage without using resources derived from some other culture at one time or another during its

history. It has been substantiated that interference is the rule rather than the exception, whether it is a major or a minor occurrence for a given culture. It is only when the invisible processes of interference are discovered that its overwhelming presence can be fully recognized and evaluated.

One implication of this recognition is that when one must choose for analyzing a certain case between the hypothesis of separate development vs. the hypothesis of interference, unless refutable on very clear grounds, in spite of our accepted inclinations, priority ought to be given to the interference hypothesis. The meaning of this is that a researcher is thus encouraged to look for interference as a highly likely option, and reject it only if a non-interference solution can be demonstrated to be stronger.

It is true that we lack evidence of interference for some cultures that nowadays seem remote and isolated. However, in the light of the overwhelming evidence of interference for the majority of the cultures of the world, the lack of evidence in some particular cases may suggest that the evidence is not yet accessible rather than that there has been no interference. Civilizations that once seemed disparate now have been shown to be interrelated. Such a case as the non-invention of the wheel by the Incas surely supports the hypothesis of lack of contacts, yet on the other hand, it also demonstrates the central role interference must have played in the diffusion of such inventions.

Hypothesis No. 2. Interference is mostly unilateral.

There is no symmetry in cultural contacts. More often than not, a target culture is interfered with by a source culture, which may ignore it. There are also cases when there may be some minor interference in one direction and a major one in another.

Hypothesis No. 3. Interference does not necessarily occur on all levels of culture.

In the case of two communities either geographically contiguous or mixed, or otherwise linked ("geographical links" can be trade routes as well as some established awareness of "the existence of the other"), interference can take place on a variety of levels but not necessarily on all levels of culture. However, it seems hard to provide evidence for cases when interference would be restricted to one sector of culture only, while all the other sectors remain intact. At the same time, with communities geographically separated from one another, partial interference is fully conceivable.

It is precisely because of the heterogeneous systemic structure of culture that a target culture may have contact with and transfer from only some sections of a source culture. A target culture is never exposed to the totality of some source, even when geographically close to it or mixed with it. Studies on immigration, acculturation, and assimilation provide ample evidence supporting this.

2. Conditions for the Emergence and Occurrence of Interference

Hypothesis No. 4. Contacts will sooner or later generate interference if no resisting conditions arise.

Contacts between communities do not necessarily generate interference. Communities may exchange any kind of goods, information, political support, or tourism without ensuing active change of their domestic repertoires. Spreading information received from a source, getting

acquainted with the political structure of that source in order to be able to cope with it (as is probably often the case of smaller vs. larger nations), or bringing souvenirs from a trip do not necessarily generate interference. In fact, communities may live side by side for long periods, even mixed with one another, seemingly without interfering.²

It is not an easy matter, however, to determine at what point we would agree that interference has started to take place. Durable contacts, while not producing conspicuously visible interference, may generate conditions of availability, which will eventually facilitate interference. Certain widely accepted attitudes towards probable contacts, and an ensuing degree of interference, may affect actual behavior when interference becomes imminent. Societies may reject any interference, because they may feel it as a threat to their integrity. At other times, the desire for change may promote a favorable attitude towards traits in another society, with the help of which, if transferred, one can hope to get away from an undesired situation. Other communities do not resent so violently borrowing from the outside, and one may observe there some kind of cultural openness towards exogenous options (and the multiplicity of cultures in general). In other societies, "anything that comes from abroad must be good." Thus, saying, "this is already current abroad, why are we lagging behind" is quite established.

Consequently, although a community can resist interference even in cases of unavoidable contacts, it cannot resist it on all levels of its culture or for long. The question thus evidently seems to be *when* interference becomes a major factor in a culture, rather than whether it operates in it or not. In the light of our understanding of systemic stratification, it would be quite plausible to hypothesize, for instance, a durable interference on the periphery of culture. Such instances can incubate for quite a long time, even for a number of generations, before they surface, as it were, in the sphere of official or dominant culture.

If we expect contacts to generate interference under any conditions, we are likely to be puzzled by cases, which look "anomalous." For instance, one wonders how it is that after so many years of coexistence, various ethnic or national groups on such a relatively small territory as Europe still keep themselves largely apart, in spite of many cultural inherited traits and intensive contacts. Switzerland alone could be a case for puzzlement, but even France – the most centralized and seemingly homogenized state in Europe – still has both small and large minorities who have resisted interference on a variety of cultural levels, like the Bretons and to some extent the Occitans.

Hypothesis No. 5. Interference occurs when a system is in need of items unavailable within itself.

A "need" may arise when people feel that the options prevailing in their culture are no longer effective, and therefore must be modified or replaced. If the domestic repertoire does not

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2. One may argue that the very integration of goods of whatever nature in a target system clearly makes them an instance of interference even though not locally produced. If Americans buy shirts made in Hong Kong, does this make Hong Kong culture interfere with American culture? However, suppose Hong Kong shirts are different from the American ones, and at first not immediately accepted yet gradually fully adopted by the Americans. Although that would not involve change in the repertoire of American shirt factories, the American repertoire would have actually changed by this adoption. Of course, when the Americans themselves would go over to producing shirts the Hong Kong style, there is no doubt that unambiguous interference would indeed have taken place. Naturally, in the 21st century Americans may eventually even produce their shirts only in Hong Kong for economic reasons.

offer any effective options for the desired change, while an accessibly adjacent group seems to own them, interference will very likely take place.

There is, however, ample evidence that such a "need" can indeed emerge not because of some internal development in a culture, but rather because of the existence of certain options in an accessibly adjacent culture, which in its turn generates the "need."

Hypothesis No. 6. A culture becomes a source by prestige.

A culture may become a source because it is evaluated as a model to emulate. Various factors contribute to making a culture prestigious. Establishedness, and highly visible presence in a world network, which create a high degree of interconnectedness, are among the factors of prestige. Political and/or economic power are not necessary conditions for acquiring prestige *per se*, but are certainly indispensable for creating high visibility/presence which in its turn may create prestige. In addition, a political power position, which helped in an initial stage to create visibility/presence, may no longer be needed after prestige has been achieved. Thus, a politically superior power may borrow massively for sectors of culture that have not been created or advanced domestically from a politically inferior power that has established cultural prestige for those sectors. This is clearly the case of Greek culture for Rome, and plausibly such cases as the French one.

It is not at all clear whether we should attribute French prestige, which lasted for several centuries among European cultures, to the political power of France. While this may be true for some periods, it is certainly not the case for other. The diffusion of French cultural models and products (both material and semiotic) during the High Middle Ages (1000-1400) cannot be divorced from the centrality of France due to its position in the Carolingian Empire; yet it was only later that France achieved her position of power and could exercise power politics with repercussions on the level of cultural consumption. I believe we have to recognize that its prestige had been established much earlier than its days of great power, and persisted long after this power had declined.³

What France was able to offer from a relatively early stage of its existence was establishedness. It had already developed many accessible institutions on a large variety of levels when other cultures just started organizing themselves. Like England, and before that Ireland, it could offer, for example, various kinds of expertise (linguistic, theological, artisanal) that was involved with the newly accepted religion in vast territories of Europe, which had not been part of the Roman Empire. In Bourdieu's terms it would be appropriate to recognize that besides its worldly riches (which had so strongly tempted the periphery people during the ninth and tenth centuries), France had accumulated an immense cultural capital that no entity that wished to organize itself along the world of networks of competition and parity could afford to ignore. This is why we see French culture play a role even for the remotest Nordic societies or for Germany and Russia in various moments of their history.

3 The role of a powerful organizing world vision like religion in making interference work through prestige is evident in all kinds of ideologies. There is no difference in this respect between the role Christianity played in the High Middle Ages and the role played by later ideologies, such as the French – and later the Russian – Revolution.

Hypothesis No. 7. A culture becomes a source by dominance.

A culture may be selected as a source when it is dominant through power. Naturally, a dominant culture often has prestige (Hyp. 6), but the dominant position does not necessarily result from this prestige, nor does it generate one. A current case under this category is a culture that is made "unavoidable" by a colonial power, which imposes culture traits (such as language and norms) on a subjugated community. For example, the fact that English and French dominated many cultures of societies ruled by them is simply due to these power relations. The same seems to be true of most cases of minority groups.

Colonial or imperialist powers do not always seem to have the same interest in inculcating their cultures into the subjected people, but the results of their dominance may eventually be almost the same. The respective behaviors of France and England vis-à-vis this issue have been dissimilar. Yet English has succeeded in taking root in such countries as India, Iraq, or black Africa almost as fully as French has in Northern and Black Africa, Lebanon, or Indo-China.

Power dominance of the imperialistic kind imposes contacts on a target and may therefore produce interference in spite of the latter's resistance. Yet in cases when the target group is not yet established – or in crisis – it may not (be able to) develop any rejecting mechanism. Such a mechanism may of course evolve at a later stage, when many supposedly appropriated culture traits turn out to have been merely temporary ones.

3. Processes and Procedures of Interference

Hypothesis No. 8. Contacts may take place with only one part of the target culture, and then proceed to other parts.

Even when appropriations are "heavy," an overall interference may not necessarily ensue. Usually certain sections of a home repertoire remain untouched, while other undergo massive invasion, or are factually created through appropriations.

Similarly, interference can be confined to only one stratum, e.g., to the center or to the periphery of the target culture. A source culture repertoire may thus first interfere with a lower or a higher stratum of a target culture, and then go over to other strata. Although initially generated by interference, when such a repertoire "goes over," it is no longer an issue of direct interference, but already an internal process within the target culture. Since in traditional studies interference – understood in terms of "influence" – is taken to be a matter of superiority vs. inferiority, it is not likely to be accepted that the "influencing" party may be of a lesser status than the "influenced" one.

Many peripheral cultures appropriate traits of commonly accepted cultural repertoire after these are well established in the central prestigious cultures of a time. This is not necessarily then carried out by appropriation from a major source, but often occurs via secondary intermediaries, who have elaborated more schematized and possibly digestible models in terms of appropriability.

Hypothesis No. 9. An appropriated repertoire does not necessarily maintain source culture features and functions.

The hypothesis about the constancy of mutation of a trait transferred from its original system is sufficiently supported by interference studies. This means that the systemic position of

particular traits in the source is not necessarily of consequence to the target. Interference transforms the transferred trait to a domestic one, which then prioritizes the target constraints over any source. In addition, the appropriation may go to some non-contemporary models in the source, due to time lag between contact and adoption, or secondary intermediation.

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