

A new approach to the typological study of contact-induced change: A case study in nominal morphosyntax

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In this talk, we present a new approach to the typological study of contact-induced change in morphosyntax, focusing on issues of language sampling and variable design. In order to disentangle areal diffusion from inheritance, we study contact dynamics between pairs of genealogically unrelated languages from all over the world. Our sample consists of 50 contact sets, representing the 24 *AUTOTYP* areas in a balanced way (Bickel et al 2017). Each contact set features three languages: the Focus Language, whose patterns of contact-induced change we aim at capturing, the Neighbor Language, which is the potential source of contact effects in the Focus Language, and the Benchmark Language, a close relative of the Focus Language, which we use to evaluate the likelihood of contact effects in the Focus Language. In order to assess contact effects between our Focus-Neighbor pairs, we gather information about a series of linguistic variables spanning phonology, morphosyntax, and the lexicon.

We will present preliminary results from two of our morphosyntactic variables, number marking on nouns and locus of marking of adnominal possession. Nominal number concerns the linguistic encoding of the distinction between ‘one’ and ‘more than one’ instance of an entity as in English *ghost* (zero-marked singular) vs *ghosts* (overtly marked plural). Locus of marking of adnominal possession is about whether the morphological marking of adnominal possession occurs on the possessor, the possessee, both, or neither (Nichols 1992). In English, the possessor is morphologically marked as in *the man’s house*; in Hungarian it is the possessee:

- (1) *az ember ház-a*
 the man house-3poss.sg
 ‘the man’s house’

Through these variables, we aim to assess instances of contact-induced change in the domain of inherent inflection (number marking) and contextual inflection (locus of marking) (see Booij 1996). Earlier literature suggests that these types of inflection respond differently to contact influence (Gardani 2012, Roberts & Bresnan 2008, Luís 2010).

Our approach to variable design is inspired by multivariate typology (e.g., Bickel 2010). For each of the variables under study, we have developed a fine-grained coding procedure, which captures similarities between the Focus and Neighbor languages going beyond the sheer presence and absence of a given feature. For instance, in the domain of nominal number marking, we gather information not only about the inventory of number distinctions, but also about any conditioning factor affecting the distribution of number marking (e.g. animacy, countability). The same applies to the locus of marking of adnominal possession where, in addition to coding languages with respect to where in the construction the possessive relation is morphologically marked, we consider such things as word order, conditioning factors that are relevant to explain language-internal variation (e.g. alienability), and the degree of boundedness of the inflectional formative.

This approach allows for a bottom-up understanding of processes of contact-induced change, and enables capturing different aspects of matter-borrowing, pattern-borrowing, and restructuring, (e.g., Adamou & Matras 2020). We argue that the method can also be applied to analyses of historical corpora, offering new compelling ways of capturing and assessing patterns of contact-induced change in the workings of morphosyntax (and beyond).

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