**Does language contact lead to morphological simplification? Possible counterevidence from the Dutch preterital system**

Isabeau De Smet, KU Leuven, Belgium
Laura Rosseel, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium
Freek Van de Velde, KU Leuven, Belgium

It has often been suggested that the morphological complexity of a language is inversely correlated with its number of adult non-native speakers (Lupyan & Dale 2008; Trudgill 2010; Dale & Lupyan 2012; Bentz & Winter 2013). This has been proposed as the reason why more secluded languages like Icelandic or Faroese use more complex case systems, while a high-contact language like English has gone through drastic simplifications throughout time (Trudgill 2002). One such simplification linked to language contact has been the regularization of the irregular past tense. De Smet & Van de Velde (2019) show in a comparison of the regularization rate of English, Dutch and German that English portrays by far the highest rate of regularization, while German, a language less affected by contact, displays the lowest rate of regularization, and Dutch takes an in-between position, both in the degree of regularization and in the degree of language contact. Carroll et al. (2012) observe that peaks in the regularization of the German irregular verb throughout the centuries co-occur with peaks in language contact in German. Finally, Dale & Lupyan (2012) show that speakers of American English (which has been subject to a higher degree of language contact) have a higher preference for regular past tense forms than speakers of British English.

However, in a Wug experiment by Cuskley et al. (2015) a conflicting trend is found for English: non-native speakers tend to use a higher rate of irregular past tense forms than native speakers. The questions rises whether similar results can be uncovered for the other Germanic languages. In this paper, we replicate the study by Cuskley and colleagues (2015) for a second Germanic language, i.e. Dutch. Both native ($N = 442$) and non-native speakers ($N = 108$) of Dutch were asked to give the past tense form of a series of nonce verbs. Our results confirm the findings by Cuskley et al. (2015): for Dutch as well, a higher preference for irregular past tense forms is found among non-native speakers. This effect tends to increase as speaker's proficiency of Dutch decreases and seems to be most outspoken for the most salient strong patterns in Dutch, such as /ɛɪ-e/ (e.g. *blijf-bleef* 'stay-stayed'). Furthermore, no other types of simplification, besides regularization, were found in the past tense strategies of non-native speakers.

Though it is not yet clear to what extent our results from this Wug task are the reflection of real-life language use of non-native speakers and caution is thus very much needed, the possibility needs to be considered that non-native speakers are not the drivers of change in Germanic verb morphology, as has previously often been assumed. Therefore, we need to explore other options, for example, that simplification in cases of language contact could be the result of native speakers trying to accommodate their own language to the influx of immigrants.

Bentz, Christian & Bodo Winter. 2013. Languages with more second language learners tend to lose nominal case. *Language Dynamics and Change* 3. 1-27.

Carroll, Ryan & Ragnar Svare & Joseph Salmons. 2012. Quantifying the evolutionary dynamics of German verbs. *Journal of Historical Linguistics* 2. 153-172.

Cuskley, Christine, Francesca Colaiori, Claudio Castellano, Vittorio Loreto, Martina Pugliese & Francesca Tria. 2015. The adoption of linguistic rules in native and non-native speakers: Evidence from a Wug task. *Journal of Memory and Language* 84. 205-223.

Dale, Rick & Gary Lupyan. 2012. Understanding the origins of morphological diversity: The linguistic niche hypothesis. *Advances in Complex Systems 15. 1-16.*

De Smet, Isabeau & Freek Van de Velde. 2019. Reassessing the evolution of West-Germanic preterite inflection. *Diachronica* 36(2). 139-179.

Lupyan, Gary & Dale, Rick. 2010. Language structure is partly determined by social structure. *PloS ONE* 5. 1-10.

Trudgill, Peter. 2002. Linguistic and Social Typology. In Jack K. Chambers, Peter Trudgill & Natalie Schilling-Estes (eds.), *The handbook of language variation and change*, 707-728. Oxford: Blackwell.

Trudgill, Peter. 2010. *Investigations in sociohistorical linguistics: Stories of colonisation and contact*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.