

Evolution of bound person indexes: the dynamic-typology approach

There are three hypotheses that have been made w.r.t. verb bound person indexes: **(the strong hypothesis)** the third person is frequently zero-coded and an overt exponent is rather exceptional (Benveniste 1971; Koch 1995); **(the moderate hypothesis)** the third person tends to be zero-marked (Bybee 1985: 53; Cysouw 2003: 61-2; Siewierska 2010); **(the weak hypothesis)** zeros – if any – tend to occur in the third person (Bickel et al. 2015).

I will test these hypotheses on 161 languages from 6 families (Dravidian, Turkic, Indo-European, Mayan, Semitic and Finno-Ugric) in such a way that I contrast the values reconstructed for the respective proto-languages on the basis of the traditional Historical-Comparative Method for each person/number index with the respective values of ca. 30 modern languages per family in order to establish diachronic trends which would hold across time and genetic/areal affiliations. I will compare the lengths of the reconstructed form for the A/(S) person indexes with the length of the same form in the modern language in order to establish whether the index has increased or decreased in length and to what extent.

I will claim that there is a universal pressure for the third person to be shorter than the other persons of the same number set (moderate asymmetry; the weak hypothesis) that constraints the length of person/number indexes in the long run. Analogically, the method will reveal that there is a diachronic adaptive pressure for the plural set to be longer than the singular set. Moreover, I will argue that these results cannot be accounted for in terms of source-motivated tendency because the indexes undergo not only simple phonetic reduction in the course of time but also addition of morphological material (due to analogy) or replacement by new markers from very versatile sources.

Finally, I will compare the dynamics of bound indexes across these six families. One might intuitively think that languages generally undergo a cyclic development along the following lines:

- (1) analytic structures (morphosyntactically independent person indexing, i.e. independent personal pronouns) > dependent (clitic > affixed) indexing > loss of affixed indexing > analytic structures > dependent ...

However, my database presents evidence to the contrary: there are some families that are biased towards completely abandoning affixed indexing in favour of analytic structures while there are families that do not show this tendency at all. This means that the cycle as in (1) can hardly be explained as just a natural drift. I will preliminary suggest that in order for this cycle to be triggered additional motivations seem to be necessary than just an “entropy drift”.

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