

## Acquisition, change, population factors, and grammaticalization

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In this talk, I argue that acquisition occurs during contact of idiolects in which children are exposed to competing alternatives in the inputs. Based on such inputs, children learn to master multiple ‘registers’ (arguably extensions of different internalized grammars) allowing communication within their community. My working hypothesis is that learning in such a multiple-varieties ecology results from a basic cognitive process: recombination, which enables human learners to merge linguistic features selected from the inputs into new variants (Aboh 2015). Accordingly, language inputs are always varied and in flux because they are created by multilingual agents.

The outputs of recombination are new hybrid linguistic constructs which in turn form the inputs of new generations. These hybrid linguistic constructs are regulated by a process of competition and selection that is subject to both linguistic and social factors. Language change, as traditionally defined, results from population factors: a population change favors certain variants over others. This would mean that traditional descriptions of grammaticalization as an independent linguistic phenomenon (e.g., Givón 1971, Heine 2003, Heine and Kuteva 2005) are misleading (e.g., Fischer 2009, Aboh 2016).

Instead, I argue that grammaticalization represents a sequence of distinct synchronic linguistic behaviours within a speech community at a certain point in time. Put together, as is often done in historical linguistics, this succession of independent and arguably unrelated linguistic group behaviours presents us with a neat picture of diachronic change, in a way similar to kaleidoscopic motion. Grammaticalization can be better understood as the aggregation of individual changes in I-languages within a given speech community over a certain period. In this framework, learning biases observed at the population level are explained in terms of UG-based constraints on recombination. Such learning biases suggest that some areas of grammar are more vulnerable to recombination than others.

### References

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