

There are plenty of I's in *team* – looking at morphosyntactic change from a psycholinguistic perspective

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While the idea that language change is rooted in the minds of individual speakers was already formulated by Hermann Paul (1846 – 1921), studies in historical linguistics have – mainly due to the infamous ‘bad data’ problem (Labov 1994: 11) – been dominated by methodologies that depend on “aggregate data that pools the productions of many speakers and writers – often across different media, genres, registers, and even across different time periods” (Arppe *et al.* 2010: 3; Petré 2017). In recent years, however, there has been a considerable rise in more experimental and methodologically innovative approaches to linguistic variation and change, where the relation between individual participants and aggregate or population levels is of more central concern (e.g. Croft 2006; Baayen *et al.* 2008; the studies reviewed in Scott-Philips & Kirby 2010; Nevalainen *et al.* 2011). Building on recent studies and developments in the realm of (historical) corpus linguistics and cognitive linguistics (especially Petré (2017), but also: Bergs & Hoffmann (2017); De Smet & Van de Velde (2017); Pentrel (2017); Winters (2017)), this paper will present an ‘experimental corpus study’ of Modern English nominalization (1500-1920) that probes different ways of using ‘found’ corpus data so that it approximates ‘elicited’ questionnaire data. In doing so, it will summarize and address some of the pitfalls as well as the benefits of embracing the fact that there are plenty of I's in *team*: historical linguists interested in revealing cognitive motivations behind linguistic change should more often adopt an approach that compares, contrasts, and explains the relation between aggregate, ‘team’-level observations and individual behaviour.

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Title

Subjectification from an evolutionary pragmatic perspective

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Abstract

This paper takes a qualitative, evolutionary pragmatic approach to the mechanisms involved in diachronic subjectification (cf. e.g. the contributions in Athanasiadou, Canakis & Cornillie 2006 and Cuyckens, Davidse & Vandelanotte 2010). This phenomenon is defined as the development by which the meanings of words or constructions “become increasingly based in the SP[eaker]/W[riter]’s subjective belief state or attitude to what is being said and how it is being said” (Traugott 2003: 125). A prime example of subjectification from the history of English is the emergence of ‘epistemic’ meanings (1b) in ‘deontic’ modals (1a).

- (1) a. John *must* work hard to survive. (objective necessity)
b. John looks tired. He *must* be working hard. (speaker’s subjective certainty)

Despite acknowledging that subjectifications represent a frequent type of semantic change, however, this paper challenges the assumption that they predominantly reflect the need of individual speakers to express their inner selves (cf. e.g. Lyons 1982: 102; Traugott 2010: 35). Instead, we argue that the role of listeners in this process, and the default assumptions both speakers and listeners make about the attitudes and beliefs of prototypical subjects, or intentional human agents, are more crucial than has been recognised so far. Reflecting deep cognitive biases, such basic ideas about human subjectivity are available to listeners for pragmatic inferencing in most utterance events, leading to more ‘subjective’ interpretations. The subsequent semanticisation of these readings, in contrast, represents the response of speakers, who come to anticipate the ways in which they are ‘second guessed’. Approaching language change in terms of cultural evolution (Kirby, Smith & Cornish 2008), properties attributed to human subjects by default can thus be viewed as cognitive constraints to which culturally transmitted constituents adapt.

To substantiate this proposal, the paper uses two different methods: On the one hand, the semantic development of verbs of the type *to cope (with)*, *to deal with* or *to manage* is investigated on the basis of the OED and the COHA. On the other hand, the paper employs evolutionary game theoretic modelling to test its hypothesis, focussing particularly on the question of (un)cooperativeness between speakers and listeners (cf. Hofbauer & Sigmund 1998; Nowak 2006; Jäger 2008; Deo 2015).

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Emergent parameters and (nano-) parametric change: a current, generative approach to diachronic syntax

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In the first part of this talk I will give a brief introduction to a new generative approach to syntactic variation and change (e.g. Biberauer and Roberts 2017). This approach rethinks the nature of parameters (e.g. Chomsky 1981, Rizzi 1982). Importantly, parameters are not pre-specified by Universal Grammar (UG); instead, they *emerge* via interaction between the three factors of language design (Chomsky 2005): i) the innate endowment (i.e. UG), ii) experience (i.e. the primary linguistic data (PLD)), and iii) principles not specific to the faculty of language (non-domain-specific cognitive optimisation principles). The explicit role and importance attributed to the latter principles (so-called third-factor principles) sets the new, emergentist view of parameters apart from many earlier approaches to parameter setting. Two key third-factor principles are Feature Economy (FE), which gives the acquirer a bias towards structural representations with as few formal features as possible, and Input Generalisation (IG), which motivates maximal exploitation and generalisation of features that have already been detected in the PLD.

The locus of parametric variation and change is the lexicon (including functional heads). Parameters can be classified according to the classes of lexical items they affect, from macroparameters affecting all heads of the relevant type (yielding e.g. consistent head-final word order across lexical categories in a language like Japanese), to nanoparameters only affecting one or more individual lexical items.

In the second part of the talk I will explore data from American Norwegian (AmNo), spoken by (mostly 3rd generation) Norwegian immigrants in North America. I will focus on the syntax of kinship nouns and what appears to be a nanoparametric change in AmNo: Norwegian as spoken in Norway has a set of syntactic constructions reserved for certain frequent kinship nouns denoting close relatives (e.g. *mother*, *father* and *brother*) (Lødrup 2014). In several speakers of AmNo, these syntactic patterns seem to have been extended to kinship nouns more generally, including nouns denoting distant relatives (e.g. *third cousin*) and also nouns denoting spouses. Although AmNo speakers are bilingual (English-AmNo), this development cannot be explained by direct cross-linguistic influence, as the novel patterns do not have English equivalents. I will show how the change can be understood in the context of an emergentist view of parameters and propose an account based on interaction between UG, PLD and third factor principles.

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