

Creole data support universal coding asymmetries

Susanne Maria Michaelis

Leipzig University, Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History, Jena

susanne.michaelis@uni-leipzig.de

Freitag,
06.03.2020
12:15–13:15
ESA1 HG HS M

In this talk, I will investigate three coding asymmetries in creole languages (Michaelis 2019, Michaelis et al. 2013):

1. motion-to vs. motion-from: *to* vs. *from*
2. dependent vs. independent possessive person-forms: *my* vs. *mine*
3. zero-marked stative verbs vs. zero-marked dynamic verbs:
Jan ø sick 'John is sick' vs. *Jan ø daans* 'John danced' (Jamaican, Farquharson 2013)

These coding asymmetries are universally detectable in the languages of the world (Haspelmath 2020a, b). They reflect functional adaptedness in that speakers strive to be most efficient in expressing a given grammatical meaning while spending as least energy as necessary. As more frequent meanings (the first member of the meaning pair, e.g. motion-to, dependent possessive person-forms etc.) are more predictable, speakers can afford to code them with less segments. Vice-versa: less predictable meanings (the second member of the meaning pair, e.g. motion-from, independent possessive person-forms etc.) have to be marked with more segments so that the chances are high for the hearer/interlocutor to retrieve the intended meaning.

Universal coding asymmetries are the outcome of hundreds, sometimes thousands of years of language change processes. In this talk, I will present evidence that creole languages support the universal coding asymmetries, even though they are young languages born out of extremely accelerated and partially abrupt change processes in the context of the European colonial expansion (16th to 20th centuries). As creole languages have evolved their complex grammatical structures within only a few hundred years, they are a good test case for functional-adaptive change processes because they demonstrate in a kind of fast motion what happens to grammatical structures under functional pressures.

References: Farquharson, Joseph (2013). Jamaican structure dataset. In Susanne Maria Michaelis, Philippe Maurer, Martin Haspelmath & Magnus Huber (eds.), *Atlas of pidgin and creole language structures online*. Leipzig: Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology. Haspelmath, Martin (2020a). Explaining grammatical coding asymmetries: Form-frequency correspondences and predictability, to appear. Haspelmath, Martin (2020b). Role-reference associations and the explanation of argument coding splits. *Linguistics*. Michaelis, Susanne Maria (2019). Support from creole languages for functional adaptation in grammar: Dependent and independent possessive person-forms. In Schmidtke-Bode, Karsten Natalia Levshina, Susanne Maria Michaelis & Ilja A. Seržant (eds.), *Typology, functional motivations and diachrony*. Berlin: Language Science Press, 179–201. Michaelis, Susanne Maria, Philippe Maurer, Martin Haspelmath & Magnus Huber (eds.) (2013). *The atlas of pidgin and creole language structures*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

AG 4