

## The Collapse of the Old Indo-Aryan Case System: A Usage-Based Account

The Old Indo-Aryan language (OIA) displayed a complex system of nominal inflection: three numbers, three genders, and eight cases were distinguished morphologically. Moreover, several declension classes were distinguished based on the terminations of noun stems. This system, however, underwent a gradual decline as OIA began to develop into Middle Indo-Aryan (MIA). By the time the modern Indo-Aryan languages began to emerge, the OIA case system had largely broken down, and had been replaced by an alternative strategy of marking arguments' roles with postpositions. This research examines the major developments in the collapse of the OIA case system from a usage-based perspective, according to which the emergence and continual reshaping of language structure is primarily the result of language use in discourse.

Specifically, this research focuses on the loss of OIA dual declensions, nominative-accusative and genitive-dative syncretism, the leveling and complete loss of distinct OIA declension classes, and the rise of postpositions as a replacement for inflectional case marking. These changes were chosen in particular because they represent the major (i.e. most widespread) changes in the development of nominal inflection from OIA up until the emergence of the modern Indo-Aryan languages—most, if not all, varieties of MIA represented in the textual record underwent these changes. Drawing data from grammatical descriptions as well as from historical texts, this research traces the development of these changes through successive stages of Indo-Aryan. It is demonstrated that the facts of the collapse of the OIA case system are compatible with a usage-based view of language change, and it is argued furthermore that these facts would be difficult to fully account for under the view that language use itself cannot be a primary mechanism for the actuation of (morphosyntactic) changes in language.

Take, as an illustrative example, the change in which the OIA suffix *-tas* was extended to mark the ablative form of nouns from all declension classes in early Middle Indo-Aryan. This suffix was used in OIA to form adverbs, usually with clear ablative senses (e.g. *sarva-* 'all', *sarvatas* 'from all directions'). This suffix could combine with a wide range of nominals (Burrow 2001: 167)—in other words, it had a high type frequency. Usage-based theory makes the claim that type frequency is the main factor in determining the degree of productivity of a construction (Bybee & Beckner 2009: 842). This is because the more diverse the contexts in which a speaker encounters a particular construction, the more salient that construction becomes in the speaker's mind as a possible strategy for conveying its meaning/function in contexts never before encountered (cf. *-ness* vs. *-ity* in English). The *-tas* suffix was extended to mark the ablative case for all MIA nouns because it was very productive, and thus easily accessed as a strategy for conveying ablative-like meanings.

A non-usage-based view might explain this change as a case of analogy without delving any further into the issue, given that analogy is a well-established process by which languages change. An explanation of this kind, however, would neglect to account for the role of productivity in influencing the direction of analogy, and would in turn fail to acknowledge that productivity, as a property of constructions, necessarily emerges out of language use—a speaker's repeated experience with a particular construction in discourse affects the construction's representation in the mind of that speaker, in terms of, for example, its degrees of salience, schematicity, entrenchment etc. (Langacker 2008).

This research adds to the growing body of literature on usage-based theory and thus contributes to a rapprochement between comparative-historical morphology and (synchronic) morphological theory in at least two meaningful ways. First, a consequence of the view that grammar is dynamic and emergent from language use is that a synchronic grammar of a language cannot be understood without reference to how it developed diachronically. Second, the emergent grammar view lends support to theories of grammar such as Radical Construction Grammar (Croft 2001), which emphasize local, rather than global, regularities, since any synchronic grammatical description is simply a snapshot in a gradual and continual process of structuration. Finally, this research also contributes to a better understanding of diachronic typology. By demonstrating how a typologically commonplace pathway of change like the collapse of a case system can and should be accounted for in terms of usage-based principles, this research provides additional support for the claim that crosslinguistic similarities and universals are often functionally-motivated.