

## Areality and Suppletion

Morphological suppletion involves maximal irregularity among paradigmatically related forms (e.g., English *go* ~ *went*, *good*~*better*~*best*; Latin *bonus* ‘good’ ~ *melior* ‘better’ ~ *optimus* ‘best’). Although sometimes differentiated from general irregularity (e.g., English *sing* ~ *sang* ~ *sung*) by use of terms like ‘strong suppletion’ vs. ‘weak suppletion’, there may be a continuum of suppletive irregularity with no clear way to draw a definitive line between two categories. Suppletion remains at the heart of much work in current morphological theorizing, and there is an increasing amount of research on the typology of suppletion. These suggest a possibility of motivated explanations for universal tendencies in suppletive paradigms (e.g., Bobaljik 2012 on locality and containment restrictions on comparative and superlative suppletion).

Given its maximal irregularity, suppletion has often been assumed by historical linguists to be resistant to diffusion and areal spread. For example, in his critical review of the ‘family tree’ model of linguistic descent and the purported limits of the comparative method given supposed rampant lexical and grammatical diffusion in Australia and elsewhere, Dixon (1997:22) lists suppletion and morphological irregularities as two out of the three “certain grammatical phenomena that are very unlikely to be borrowed, under any circumstances.” In a different context, Langdon (1988:492) remarks that, “It seems to me that suppletion per se is not necessarily a prime candidate for diffusion, though of course stranger things have happened.”

Nevertheless, some recent studies suggest the possibility that there could indeed be some areal spread of suppletive patterns—e.g., Veselinova (2013) finds that suppletion for imperatives clusters in Africa and Mesoamerica, and Bobaljik (2012:17) notes that the distribution of most examples of suppletive comparatives and morphological superlatives “seems to be limited to languages historically from Europe and its closest neighbors—a Greater European Sprachbund.” Similarly, in their survey of and reconstructions for suppletive verbs in Uto-Aztecan (UA), Haugen & Everdell (2015) note that some contiguous non-UA language families also contain suppletion for verbal number agreement, but only in certain parts of the UA range (“the Greater Southwest”) and not in others (the Mesoamerican Sprachbund); e.g., compare Hopi (Hp, UA) and Zuni (Zn, isolate) suppletive forms for ‘to sleep’: Hp *puuwi* ‘sleep. SG/DL’ ~ *tookya* ‘sleep.PL’, vs. Zn *?ala* ‘sleep.SG’ ~ *ya:tela* ‘sleep.PL’.

In this workshop presentation we highlight the question of whether suppletive morphology may be amenable to areal diffusion by discussing the above examples and surveying other language areas from around the world. Major questions in our investigation include:

- (1) Can suppletive morphology be diffused? If so, what are the mechanisms of such diffusion?;
- (2) If so, how much contact (i.e., level of bilingualism, duration of contact, etc.) might the spread of suppletion indicate?;
- (3) Is suppletion itself diffusible (i.e., can non-supplementing languages gain suppletion simply through contact)?;
- (4) Are there analogs of ‘calques’ in suppletion? (i.e., are there cases where a pattern of opposition getting marked by suppletion transfers without actually involving the transfer of the particular forms?);
- (5) Can the conditioning environments for or constraints on suppletion diffuse?;
- (6) How do we tease apart actual diffusion from universals which might independently arise in different families at different times?

The answers to the above questions will be important for historical linguistics, studies of language contact and the typology of suppletion, and they could also significantly bear on theoretical discussions of the place of suppletion in synchronic grammars (e.g., for theories of morphology which treat ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ suppletion as a category distinction).