

## Loss of inflection from the perspective of areal typology

Inflectional vs. syntactic strategies are a central typological distinction in language, often reflected in areal patterns. Thus the variety of Portuguese spoken in the Sri Lankan linguistic area (Bakker 2006) has shifted from analytic to synthetic case marking by repurposing originally independent words as suffixes:

Sri Lankan Tamil	<i>avar'-r'a</i>	<i>makaL-ukku</i>
Sri Lankan Portuguese	<i>osi:r-su</i>	<i>fi:y9-p9</i>
	him-GEN	daughter-DAT
(cf. Portuguese)	<i>para sua</i>	<i>filha</i>
	for his	daughter

Such patterns can be thought of as contact-induced parallel growth, realised through the borrowing of functional categories and word formation patterns. As a result, a group of languages converge towards what looks like a shared underlying morphology overlaid with different lexical material, evidenced by the possibility of morpheme-by-morpheme translation.

But the opposite scenario must also occur, since we also find language areas such as the Mainland Southeast Asia Sprachbund (Enfield 2005) which are characterised by the ABSENCE of inflection. In some instances the contact-induced loss of inflection can be regarded as assimilation to a non-inflecting structure (e.g. the minority languages in English-speaking areas documented by Polinsky 1995), but at other times it seems to occur even without the involvement of a non-inflecting contact language (e.g. German in Hungary and Ukraine: Franke 2008). Such examples point instead towards parallel loss of inflection in multiple languages which were previously inflected (cf. the parallel merger of genitive and dative cases in several Balkan languages: Friedman 2006). This chimes with recent suggestions that language contact involving L2 acquisition leads to morphological simplification, irrespective of the structure of the languages involved. For example, Bentz & Winter (2013) suggest a negative relationship between the proportion of non-native speakers of a language, and the number of nominal case distinctions it makes.

The loss of a morphological system, in the absence of a non-inflecting model language, clearly requires a different explanation from the parallel development of morphological systems. But this strand of work has not proposed an explicit mechanism for the contact-induced loss of inflection, beyond the idea that it is related to imperfect learning by non-native speakers. Nor indeed does the discipline have any comprehensive typological perspective on the 'internal' loss of inflection, or an explanation of how the two phenomena are related. As a first step towards such an explanation, we review examples of the diachronic loss of nominal case marking which have been attributed to language contact in three language families: (i) Slavic (ii) Romance, and (iii) Germanic. On the basis of these case studies, we suggest a possible mechanism for the contact-induced loss of inflection: the coalescence of local patterns of syncretism from multiple source languages, where the syncretisms range from small numbers of lexemes up to exceptionless generalisations. We then discuss the place of this mechanism in our wider typology of the loss of inflection.

### References

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