Multilingual Language Acquisition and Crosslinguistic Influence as Co-activation

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In this talk, I will outline an approach to multilingual language acquisition where cross-linguistic influence is assumed to be due to co-activation of previously learned languages in processing. This will be done within the Linguistic Proximity Model of L3/Ln acquisition (Westergaard et al. 2017, Westergaard 2019, forthcoming), which argues that the main factor responsible for crosslinguistic influence is abstract linguistic similarity among the three languages involved, although superficial lexical/phonological similarity may also play a role at early stages, before there are stable representations in the L3/Ln. On this model, L3/Ln acquisition is learning by parsing (both in comprehension as well as production), where the L3 is built up incrementally in a step-wise fashion, property by property. In this process, both previously acquired grammars stay active (presumably to different degrees, depending on the level of similarity as well as certain other factors). Thus, there is what I refer to as Full Transfer Potential (FTP), meaning that anything may transfer (from either or both previously acquired grammars), not that everything necessarily does transfer (by copying the whole grammar at the initial state/stages, e.g. Schwartz & Sprouse 1996, 2020, Rothman et al. 2019).

I will present the theoretical foundation of the model in comparison to other models of L3 acquisition, discuss some predictions, introduce the optimal methodology to test these the predictions, and finally discuss some supporting data.

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Assembling the pieces in sound change: Beyond Somebody Else's Problem

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 Sound change is often discussed in terms of paradoxes, as illustrated below, and we now understand enough about sound change to resolve many of them. Doing so means not just focusing on particular aspects of a change — phonetics, phonology, variation, or acquisition, etc. — but integrating these into a coherent whole. Some of our most famous problems arose because we have limited the aspects we consider, leaving the rest as Somebody Else's Problem, as in Adams' *Hitchhiker's Guide*: "An SEP is something we can't see, or don't see, or our brain doesn't let us see, because we think that it's somebody else's problem. That's what SEP means. Somebody Else's Problem. The brain just edits it out …." Phonologists may not 'see' phonetic processes or phoneticians abstract phonology. Consider some paradoxes and resolutions.

A synthetic perspective resolves the 'paradox of phonologization' in West Germanic umlaut (Liberman 1991, Kiparsky 2015). Umlaut, the fronting of back vowels before /i(:), j/ remains when those triggers weaken and are lost — *skōni > German *schön*. Kiparsky (2015:564) asks: "when the conditioning environment goes away …, *why* do its effects remain?" Much work assumes that umlaut phonologized while variants were still in complementary distribution. This paradox arises from a lack of attention to phonetics and transgenerational transmission. Learners build phonologies in part with phonetic input, here fronted allophones with reduced triggers — i.e. phonologization occurs a generation after complementary distribution. The Germanic umlaut situation has been regarded as extremely rare, but Algonquian palatalization (*t > Menominee tʃ /_ e(:), j, Cudworth 2019, Salmons 2021) is closely parallel. And our perspective resolves an ostensible violation of a typological universal about palatalization (Bateman 2011), where /e(:)/ triggers but /i(:)/ doesn't.

Incorporating Labovian structured heterogeneity is equally consequential. First, rhotics across North and West Germanic show an apparent paradox of massive phonetic variation / change but fundamental phonological stability. Phonological underspecification allows and drives that asymmetry (Natvig 2020). Second, work on lenition yields conflicting results about frequency effects (Bermúdez-Otero et al. 2015, Todd et al. 2019). Finer-grained attention to variationist conditioning reframes our understanding of this for American English *t*-glottalization (Holmstrom 2021). That perspective brings a rarely noticed oddity into view, that more lenited forms are found in more formal styles, and it may sugest a potential resolution of it (Vanhecke 2021). I close with how we can further test and expand this approach.

Overcoming SEP — learning to see more — and effectively assembling the pieces in sound change may further progress in historical phonology more than work on particular subfields of sound change studies.

Double comparatives: structural complexity and evaluativity

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In this talk, based on joint work with Fenia Karkaletsou and Despina Oikonomou, I will discuss double comparatives (DCs), illustrated in (1), as they give a clearer perspective on the syntax and semantics of comparatives:

(1)   more louder

According to Cuzzolin and Lehmann (2004: 1217), in languages that have both analytic and synthetic comparatives, it is common to find DCs, i.e. analytic forms co-occurring with synthetic ones. DCs are defined as combining analytic and synthetic forms, but as we will see DCs can also involve doubling of the affix building the synthetic form.

   In spite of the fact that DCs are typically seen as slips/errors, they are very common in several Indo-European languages. DCs have been discussed in detail in the diachrony of English and somewhat in Dutch, see e.g. Corver (2005), however, there is practically no formal work on DCs in Greek, (2). Moreover, an analysis of the semantic contribution of DCs remains elusive:

(2)   a. perisotero kalitero   b. pio   kalitero   b.   kaliterotero
           more   better   more   better   good-er-er   'betterer'

A comparison of English and Greek DCs will show that the diachronic development of DCs is similar in both languages and that DCs occur in similar if not identical contexts. Moreover, Greek has one synthetic and two analytic forms for comparatives, (2) which differ in several respects. Importantly it has a specific structure related to the so-called evaluativity *inference* of comparatives, discussed in Rett (2008): gradable predicates are interpreted relative to a contextually provided standard of comparison.

   Building on Corver (1997), Matushansky (2001), Solt (2010), Makri (2018), I will show that analytic and synthetic comparatives do not have an identical structure, see also Sauerland & Alexiadou (2020). I will demonstrate that analytic forms are not alike across languages: Greek has two types of analytic comparatives, only one of which is structurally more complex than the synthetic form, cf. Makri (2018). Following Rett (2008), Moracchini (2018), I take more complex structures to be evaluative. DCs differ from regular Single Comparatives (SCs, both synthetic and analytic): DCs are structurally more complex than their SCs counterparts; as a result, DCs are always *evaluative* as part of their meaning, i.e., DCs involve comparison among degrees which exceed the contextual standard.

Shared constructions across the Danish-German border: a diasystematic view on areal convergence

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The linguistic varieties spoken near the Danish-German border have been in constant contact with each other almost since the dawn of history, albeit under varying circumstances (Fredsted 2009, Höder 2019). Even today, multilingualism at the territorial, collective, and individual level is common in the region. It is little wonder, then, that there has been a considerable amount of areal convergence between the regional varieties of Danish (including South Jutlandic dialects), German (including Low German dialects), and North Frisian. As a consequence, local Danish and German non-standard varieties share a range of areal features that diverge markedly from at least one of the respective standards. Examples include a SHALL future (Dahl 2000) and an animacy-based pronominalization split in German varieties as well as a linking possessive construction (Koptjevskaja-Tamm 2001) in Danish dialects.

There is a cognitive dimension to areal convergence: Present-day arealisms can be assumed to reflect cognitive preferences of multilingual speakers and communities in the past. The talk argues, based on an analysis of selected features, that areal convergence can be interpreted and to some extent explained using Diasystematic Construction Grammar (DCxG), a usage-based approach that revolves around the idea that multilinguals organize their linguistic knowledge into one multilingual constructicon, which comprises both language-specific and language-unspecific constructions. Increasing structural similarity, from this point of view, imply a simplification of the constructicon as a whole.

It will be argued that it is possible to reconstruct common constructions for multilingual communities in the border region in the past. In particular, three mechanisms are identified that conspire towards an increasingly simple multilingual constructicon: (a) pro-diasystematic change (a form of pragmatic bleaching, based on multilingual speakers' preference for language-unspecific constructions), (b) diaconstructionalization (a reorganization of pre-existing constructions so as to facilitate interlingual identification), and (c) diasystematic stability (a failure to undergo changes that are happening outside the contact area) (Höder forthc.).

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