
The external typology of the loss of inflection

Helen Sims-Williams
Surrey Morphology Group, University of Surrey
j.sims-williams@surrey.ac.uk

– joint work with Matthew Baerman –

The loss of inflectional morphology has been instrumental in shaping many languages, but has been relatively little studied. We present a model of inflectional loss along two parameters:y

1. Mechanism of change, subdivided into LOSS, EXTENSION or DISPLACEMENT. Loss is seen in the history of Malayalam, where subject suffixes were gradually dropped (Ramaswami Ayyar 1936), so that the loss of inflectional contrasts was a by-product of morphological attrition. Extension is inherently contrast erasing, as in Mand (Trans New Guinea), where the 3SG subject form is taking over the paradigm (Daniels 2015). Displacement comes from the outside the paradigm, as in Basque verbs, where periphrastic verbal constructions replace synthetic ones (Jendraschek 2003).

2. Manner of change, subdivided into two cross-cutting contrasts. UNIDIRECTIONAL vs. MULTIDIRECTIONAL change is seen in the contrast between Mand, where all values converge on the 3SG, vs. Ancient Egyptian, where the stative verb ends up swapping subject suffixes at random (Sethe 1899). GLOBAL vs. INCREMENTAL change is seen in the contrast between Mand, where the loss of subject marking affects all values simultaneously, and Swedish, where loss of person precedes loss of number (Mørck 2005).

While inflectional loss has many potential causes (morphological, phonological, morphosyntactic or semantic), this typology relies solely on observable properties, as a first step towards a broader account.

References: • Daniels, D. (2015): A reconstruction of Proto-Sogeram. PhD Thesis, UCSB. • Jendraschek, G. (2003). When Old Paradigms Die, New Paradigms are Born. *Journal of Universal Language* 4, 27–59. • Mørck, E. (2005): Morphological developments from Old Nordic to Early Modern Nordic. Bandle, O. et al. (eds), *The Nordic Languages* (vol. 2) 1128–1149. • Ramaswami Aiyar, L. V. (1936): *The Evolution of Malayalam Morphology*. • Sethe, K. (1899): *Das Aegyptische Verbum im Altaegyptischen, Neuägyptischen und Koptischen* (v. 2).