

Title:

Grammaticalisation in a multilingual matrix: the copulative prominence marker in Nen and Nmbo

Presenters:

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In this paper we draw on fine-grained sociolinguistic data to examine the subtly differing trajectories of an emerging prominence marker in Nen and Nmbo, two neighbouring and related languages spoken in a richly multilingual region of southern New Guinea. In both languages, the sequence of a demonstrative plus a copula inflected for person, number and tense is grammaticalising to a prominence marker which may follow the first NP constituent. As it grammaticalises, reductions are occurring both in the morphological contrasts exhibited by the copula (converging on the 3rd singular present form), and in the exact phonological realisation of the sequence (fusing to a single monosyllabic word). The question we examine is: how do such innovations proceed when two speech communities are linked by widespread bilingualism, whether active or passive, including many individuals who regularly use both languages in the course of their daily lives. We draw on fine-grained sociolinguistic data from over 30 individuals (CHECK) in each speech community, including around a dozen who are fluent enough in both languages that they were willing to conduct parallel interviews.

Studies of grammaticalisation have in general been carried out in monolingual settings, without emphasis on the sorts of interpersonal variation that is the focus of variationist studies. The latter have likewise focussed largely on monolingual communities, and although the co-present variants focussed on in grammaticalisation studies should be readily compatible with variationist theory, in fact standard variationist treatises pay little attention to the grammaticalisation literature.¹ Yet if we are to understand how new grammatical structures arise in multilingual settings, these two approaches need to be brought together.

In situations of language contact, grammaticalisation processes in two languages A and B could theoretically influence each other in the following ways:

- (a) there could be structural convergence, e.g. motivated by such factors as cognitive economy, resulting in 'parallel grammaticalisation' – a widely assumed process in linguistic areas / Sprachbünde
- (b) there could be structural divergence, as speakers (possibly subconsciously) emphasise different structural patterns as a means of social differentiation
- (c) processes of grammaticalisation could proceed independently in the two languages, with no mutual influence of any kind

¹ For example, the word 'grammaticalisation' does not appear in the index of either Vol. 1 or Vol. 3 of Labov's *magnum opus* Principles of Linguistic Change (need to check Vol. 2), and in Meyerhoff & Schlee's Routledge Sociolinguistics Reader there is just a single reference to grammaticalisation in the index (to work by Traugott).

(d) various combinations of (a) to (c) could occur, e.g. there could be convergence at one level (e.g. the emergence of a prominence marker), divergence at another (e.g. the base form or morphological structure used to represent it), and independent developments at another (e.g. specific sound changes accompanying phonological reduction)

A final nuance is that the behaviour of fluent bilinguals who switch accurately between two systems, may not match that of speakers whose mastery of both languages is less.

In this study we draw on a sample of X hours of Nen and Y hours of Nmbo speech, including standard bio-interview questions, matched-topic interviews (e.g. 'coconut stories', hunting stories) and other more opportunistic recordings. The corpus is designed to maximise our sample of inter-individual variation, as far as practical, including a good number of speakers bilingual in Nmbo and Nen (including both L1:L2 patterns). All relevant instances of emergent prominence markers were coded, as well as copulas used outside the prominence construction, along the dimensions of morphological and phonological reduction, and analysed using XX. We shall show how this approach gives a much more subtle answer to the question of how grammaticalisation proceeds in a region characterised by egalitarian multilingualism. We conclude by relating our findings to the broader question of what role multilingualism plays, in a setting like New Guinea, in the genesis of structural diversity.