
Accounting for morphological complexity vs. simplification in situations of language contact: evidence from Cappadocian Greek

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1 Introduction

The last two decades the notion of complexity has become central to modern linguistic theorizing in terms of providing explanations for the architecture of grammar, language processing, language acquisition, language variation and change. Different perspectives have led to various proposals on the different forms (distinctions) of complexity such as absolute vs. relative complexity (Dahl 2004), local vs. global complexity (Miestamo 2006), I- vs. E-complexity (Di Sciullo 2012), enumerative vs. integrative complexity (Ackerman & Malouf 2013), formal vs. processing complexity (Culicover 2013), system complexity vs. complexity of exponence (Anderson 2015).

The aim of this paper is to offer further insights on the notion of local “autonomous” (cf. Aronoff 1994; Anderson 2015) morphological complexity vs. simplification in the light of the evidence provided by language contact, a parameter which is thought to be interrelated with change in the complexity of linguistic systems (simplification Trudgill 2011 vs. complexification Nichols 1992). For the purposes of this paper we use the notions of complexity vs. simplification a) in order to refer to the formal properties of the examined systems with particular emphasis on regularity, economy, and (formal) markedness relationships or lack thereof (cf. Trudgill 2011 and Siegel 1997 for pidgin and creoles) and b) as theory-internal concepts (i.e. as theoretical notions), although we take something like ‘language simplification’ to occur in language users’ minds.

2 Data

To this end, we draw our data from Cappadocian, an Asia Minor Greek variety spoken for great many centuries in a situation of regressive bilingualism due to intense contact with the agglutinative Turkish language (among others Dawkins 1916; Karatsareas 2011; Janse forthcoming and references therein). Cappadocian is the most highly differentiated dialectal variety of Greek, due to the very long period of isolation from developments involving the rest of the Greek-speaking world, and to the long duration of contact with Turkish. Due to the historical circumstances under which Cappadocian evolved, Cappadocian is characterized by a significant number of linguistic innovations, some of which are generally attributed to the language-contact factor. These innovations brought research on

Cappadocian to the forefront of modern language (contact) studies (among others Dressler & Acson 1985; Thomason & Kaufman 1988; Winford 2005).

For the purposes of this paper, different morphological phenomena are chosen to be exemplified based on their autonomous morphological status as follows:

- i. The loss of the originally three different grammatical gender distinctions in nouns:

(1) padifax.NEU 'king'
baldəza.NEU 'sister-in-law'

- ii. The tendency towards the establishment of a unique nominal inflectional paradigm with the generalized use of (the neuter) *-ja -ju* markers, substituting the several original subgroups of nouns:

(2) antropos 'man.NOM.SG' atropos-ju 'man.GEN.SG' atropoz-ja 'man.NOM.PL'

- iii. The reduction of lexical stem allomorphy, as realized in derivational affixation, where imperfective stems instead of the (usually selected) perfective ones are selected for the formation of deverbal nouns:

(3) ðin(o) 'to give' ðini_{IMPERF}-ma 'giving' instead of *dosi_{PERF}-ma
xan(o) 'to lose' xani_{IMPERF}-ma 'loss' instead of *xasi_{PERF}-ma

- iv. The loss of the morphological process of derivational prefixation. The vast majority of otherwise prefixed verbal forms are realized by loanword elements:

(4) yopartiz(u) < koparmak 'to break off, to tear off' instead of kse-kolo
dayuldiz(u) < dağılmak 'to scatter, to disperse' instead of ðia-lio

- v. The loss of rivalry among competing derivational suffixes (e.g. *-ma, -simo, -si, -ja*) for the formation of deverbal nouns with the generalization of one productive suffix (i.e. *-ma*):

(5) ðin(o) 'to give' ðini-ma 'giving' instead of do-sim(o)
çoru 'to see, to attend to' çori-ma 'attention' instead of çori-si
vriz(o) 'to insult' vrizi-ma 'insult' instead of vris-ja

3 Proposal

All the observed phenomena, which constitute arbitrary aspects of morphological structure, are seen as instances of loss of morphological complexity, arguing in favor of language simplification in situations of intense language contact (contra Nichols 1992: 193). Nevertheless, while, in a broader perspective, all phenomena lead to a simpler morphological organization, either in terms of system complexity (loss of rivalry among derivational affixes, loss of prefixation as a derivational process, loss of gender) or in terms of complexity of exponence (elimination of allomorphy, loss of multiple inflection classes), following Anderson's (2015) categorization¹, they cannot not be treated adequately under a unified account.

We propose that some of them should be attributed to the direct influence, thus the direct reflex of complexity or simplicity of the model language, in terms of grammatical pattern replication, (loss of gender, the unique inflectional paradigm and loss of prefixation), while others (loss of rivalry among suffixes and elimination of allomorphy) as the result of the pressure that was exerted on the replica language by the dominant system into regression, paving the way into simplification i.e. regularity, economy and loss of redundancy, through minimization of rivalry among elements and categories with similar function. We propose that the former notions would account for *language-dependent simplification phenomena* in terms of grammatical pattern shift, while the latter for *independent complexity vs. simplification phenomena*, acknowledging, however, that in some cases they may well join forces in the same direction of change.

Generalizing, our data seem to suggest that that in accounting for morphological complexity and the phenomena that are prone or resistant to loss in language contact situations, we should always take into account cross-linguistic divergence, the properties of the specific language set (model vs. replica language) and the compatibility or incompatibility parameter, as well as the notions of regularity, economy and markedness.

References

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¹ One should note, that the proposed taxonomy (between system complexity and complexity of exponence), does not appear to be able to make predictions on the amenability of the one over the other subgroup to change or on the conditions under which these phenomena are more or less easily susceptible to it.

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