Typology, Diachrony, and the History of English

Frans Plank (U Konstanz)
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The Question

Typology is about variation across languages, Diachrony is about variation in time. From which of the two angles you chose to look at it, the crosslinguistic or the diachronic one, variation is not unlimited—but where do the limitations come from? Are they due to constraints on variation across languages or on variation in time, or on both?

Relationships between Typology and Diachrony

(a)   Universals impose limits on variation across languages (absolutely or conditionally), at any and all times; they thereby constrain change insofar as a language must not change so as to violate a timeless law, or at any rate not without subsequent changes swiftly redressing the balance one way or another. (There are no laws of change itself.)

(b)   Assuming that particular targets (forms, categories, constructions, rules, constraints) can only result from particular mechanisms of change operating on particular sources, this would impose limits on how languages can differ: they can only be what they could become. (There are no timeless universals; co-variation is due to co-evolution.)

How can something ("language") change which is not an individual with temporal continuity?

Relationships between linguistic experience and grammatical representation

(a')   Achronic (or panchronic) laws:
    Achronic (a.k.a. panchronic) laws proscribe different grammatical representations of the same data. Learners or more advanced speakers abiding by such achronic laws may need temporal experiences to trigger a representation (if a law is implicational, the implicans will need to be encountered as a trigger of the implicatum); but what is invariable, and in this sense timeless, are the representations which successive generations may form of such data.

(b')   Chronic (or diachronic) laws:
    Diachronic (or simply chronic) laws are ones which force particular grammatical representations upon learners or more advanced speakers, or put such representations out of their reach, whenever they encounter data of a particular kind, and these data have been produced by previous speakers on the basis of different internal representations.

Exemplifying the difficulty of attributing responsibility for limited variability to typology, diachrony, or both

(1)   dual limited to nouns   preference for basic order VSO

      Law of Change: ???
                        (perhaps indirect, to do with pro-drop inclination of VSO,
                        favouring the selective grammaticalization of a dual on nouns)

(2)   Universals about the position of question markers (QMs)

    (QM1)   a.   Mostly, QMs are either sentence-initial or sentence-final.
            b.   If QMs are clitic, they tend to be enclitic to the sentence-initial constituent.
    (QM2)   Binary choice question tags are almost always sentence-final, multiple choice tags sentence-initial.
    (QM3)   Provided the position of QMs is specified relative to the sentence as a whole, if they are sentence-initial, then with more than chance frequency there will be prepositions, while if they are sentence-final, then there will be postpositions.
               (Equivalently, by transposition under negation: Provided ..., if there are postpositions, then QMs are likely to be sentence-final, and if there are prepositions, then QMs are likely to be sentence-initial.)
    (QM4)   a.   Provided the position of QMs is specified relative to particular words, they almost always follow that word.
            b.   If the dominant word order is VSO, then there are no such word-anchored QMs.
    (QM5)   If basic word order is SOV, QMs are almost always sentence-final, if basic word order is not SOV, there is a greater likelihood than with basic SOV that QMs will be sentence-initial.
    (QM6)   If QMs are suffixes, then basic word order is mostly SOV.
    (QM7)   Provided they are affixes, QMs can only be suffixes.
    (QM8)   Provided they are affixes (on verbs), QMs are usually final suffixes.
    (QM9)   If QMs are affixes, then basic word order is not SVO.

    Scenarios for the grammaticalisation of QMs

    1. Fragments of second disjunct, with polarity reversed
      (1)   a.   **An impostor has tricked us,** *(or) hasn't he tricked us*?
           b.   **An impostor has tricked us,** *hasn't he*?
      (2)   **There were questions,** *weren't there*?
    2. Anticipated answers
      (3)   **There were questions,** *yes/no/perhaps/huh*?
    3. Meta-predicates for truth values
      (4)   a.   *Is it right/true/agreed that* **there were questions?**
           b.   *Right*, **there were questions?**
      (5)   **There were questions:** *(Is this) right/true/o.k.*?
    4. Propositional and other not-so-specific WH pronouns
      (6)   *What/Why/How come*, **there were questions?**
      (7)   *How about* **emigrating to Appenzell?**
      (8)   a.   *Was/Wie*, **es gab keine Fragen?**
           b.   **Es gab keine Fragen,** *was/wie*?
             'What/How, there were no questions, what/how?'

(9) A: Niemand hat eine Frage gestellt.
'Nobody asked a question.'
B: Was / Wie (bitte)?
'What / How (I beg your pardon)?'
A: Es gab wirklich keine Fragen.
'There were really no questions.'

5. *Insubordination, via question repetition*
(10) *Ob* Saussure nach Appenzell ausgewandert ist?
Whether Saussure to Appenzell emigrated has
[I'm asking myself, and perhaps you have an opinion too]
'Has Saussure emigrated to Appenzell?'
(11) A: Ist Saussure nach Appenzell ausgewandert?
'Has Saussure emigrated to Appenzell?'
B: Du fragst (wirklich), ob Saussure nach Appenzell ausgewandert ist?
'Are you (really) asking whether Saussure ...?'
Und ob er nach Appenzell ausgewandert ist!
and whether he to Appenzell emigrated has
'That's precisely what he has done: emigrate to Appenzell!'

6. *Safeguarding interaction: attracting attention, ascertaining understanding, requesting response*
(12) *Hey, you, listen*, **there were no questions?**
(13) **There were absolutely no questions,** *got it*?
(14) **There were no questions,** *tell me*?

7. *Internalisation: prosodic integration, cliticisation to mobile host or to focus constituent or to first constituent*

8. *Reanalysis of other bound morphology*
(15) **Saussure (and) emigrate to Appenzell?**
(16) **Saussure (and) a structuralist?!**

(3) v) v (contrastive) nasal vowels imply (corresponding) oral vowels
explanation: markedness

Law of Change: v)< v *by nasalization (due to following or preceding nasal consonant, lost after assimilation)*

(4) infixes adfixes i.e., +infixes, +adfixes (i)
−infixes, +adfixes (ii)
−infixes, −adfixes (iii)
* +infixes, −adfixes (iv)

Explanation:
discontinuous constituents imply continuous ones (descriptive generalization);
because they are are harder to store and to process (functional reason)
NB: What is not ruled out by proscribing (iv) are direct transitions from (i) to (iii) and vice versa.

Law of Change: infixes < adfixes   *by metathesis (to optimize syllable structure)*
or by entrapment (reanalysing an outer adfix
as part of the stem),
assuming (plausibly) that not all adfixes
will get metathesized and that not all outer
adfixes will trap inner adfixes

Explanation (?): re-ranking of priorities, phonology above morphology

grammatical representation of infixes and how they can change: restructuring, as e.g. in Latin (morphological infixes remain edge-bound, though):

Morphology: Suffixes	fud-N-, vik-N-, rup-N-	si-N-, ster-N-
Phonology: Metathesis or not	fuNd-, viNk-, ruNp-	siN-, sterN-
(after sonorant)		

Morphology: Infixes and Suffixes	fu-N-d, vi-N-k-, ru-N-p-	si-N-, ster-N-
Phonology: —	fuNd-, viNk-, ruNp-	siN-, sterN-

elsewhere the phonological rule of metathesis is lost without (some) adfixes restructured as morphological infixes; hence automatic re-externalization, i.e. infixes > adfixes (no unidirectionality!)

(5)   palatalized labials   palatalized dentals   palatalized velars

Law of Change: Palatalization spreads from back to front targets
(i.e., along contiguous positions in articulatory space)

(6)   If a language uses the same grammatical form (i.e., middle) in the expression of verbs of non-translational and translational motion, then it will also use that form in the expression of at least some verbs of change in body posture.

Law of Change: The coverage of forms such as middles spreads along
contiguous areas in the relevant semantic space.

(7)   verbal morpheme with both reflexive and passive use   anticausative use

Laws of Change:
- REFLEXIVE   >   (REFLEXIVE)
  ANTICAUSATIVE   *by bleaching (loss of meaning "agentive")*
- X (REFLEXIVE) >   REFLEXIVE
  PASSIVE   *?*

(8)   NP$_{obj}$ V   NP$_{comp}$ Postp   NP$_{comp}$ Postp   NP$_{gen}$ N
V NP$_{obj}$ Prep NP$_{comp}$ Prep NP$_{comp}$ N NP$_{gen}$

Laws of Change: NP$_{comp}$ Postp < NP$_{obj}$ V   *by grammaticalization*
< NP$_{gen}$ N   *by grammaticalization*
Prep NP$_{comp}$ < V NP$_{obj}$ *by grammaticalization*
< N NP$_{gen}$ *by grammaticalization*
(loss of feature content:
[+N, -V] , [-N, +V] > [-N, -V])

French *chez Charles* < *casa Caroli*
English *concerning$_{prep}$ Charles$_{compl}$* < *concerning$_V$ Charles$_{obj}$*

Modern English postposition *ago* < past participle (*agon*), *by grammaticalization*
       adjectival use ('gone by, bygone, past')
              For it was ago fif yer that he was last ther (1314)
              I speke of mony a hundred yere a-go (1386)
              It is not yet longe tyme agoo that suche costume was vsed (1450)
       adverbial use ('long since, long ago') (but cf. *I met him ago)
              it is longe ago that I knew him (1377)

cf. It. due anni fa (< two years it-makes), Fr. il y a deux ans (< it there has two years)
cf. during, pending, concerning, excepting, including vs. notwithstanding,
      permitting, excepted, included

German prepositions
     kraft, dank, (an)statt **governing** DAT or GEN < N, **governing only** GEN
     während, **governing** GEN or DAT < V, **governing only** ACC
     entsprechend, **governing** GEN or DAT < V, **governing only** DAT

(9)   DEFINITE   SG   PL
         Masha found **the** mushroom   **the** mushrooms
    INDEFINITE   SG   PL
         Masha found **a** mushroom   Ø mushrooms
         Masha found **sm`**mushroom           **sm`**mushrooms

- overt indefinite article in plural NPs   overt indefinite article in singular
NPs (provided there is an indefinite article at all)

    explanation in terms of markedness reversal:
    While plural is marked vis-à-vis singular in definite NPs, requiring some
    extra formal expenditure, it is the other way round in 'ignorative' (indefinite
    and interrogative) NPs, with ignorativity and non-individuation (i.e., non-
    singular) being mutually conducive, rendering singular the marked number
    in these circumstances.

- Law of Change: indefinite article < numeral 'one' (lacking a plural)
                             by grammaticalization
                < quantifier 'some' (lacking a sg?)
                               by grammaticalization

DEFINITE   SG   PL
    Aus Amerika ist **er/sie** gekommen   ... sind **sie** gekommen
    'from America has he/she come   ... have they come'

INDEFINITE   SG   PL
    Aus Amerika ist **eine(r)** gekommen   ... sind **Ø** gekommen
                                     ... sind **welche** gekommen
                                       ... sind **eine [oa]** gekommen
                                       ... ist **man** gekommen
    'from America has someone come   ... have some come'

- overt plural indefinite pronoun   overt singular indefinite pronoun

- Law of Change:

  indefinite pronoun < numeral 'one' (lacking a plural) *by grammaticalization*
  < quantifier 'some' (lacking a sg?) *by grammaticalization*
  < interrogative pronoun *by grammaticalization*
  < generic noun *by grammaticalization*
  < ...

Bavarian

Da Sepp hat an Apfe gessn   ... hat oa Epfe gessn
the Sepp has an apple eaten   ... has a-PL apples eaten
        (cf. Standard German: ... hat Ø Äpfel gegessen)

cf. also other non-singular uses of the numeral 'one':

    to express higher numerical or quantificational meanings (e.g., 'one-DUAL' meaning 'two', 'one-PLURAL' meaning 'several'),
    to form a distributive numeral ('one each'),
    to group accompanying nouns ('one-DUAL shoe', i.e. 'one pair of shoes', vs. 'one-SG shoe'),
    to agree with dualia/pluralia tantum nouns in number ('one-PLURAL scissors'),
    to number-agree with any nouns when part of a complex higher numeral ('twenty-one-PL pages'),
    upon conversion to (pro-) nounhood ('Which mushrooms did he eat? — The poisonous one-PL'),
    just so (as in the case of the Bavarian plural pronoun [oa]).

English

Soþlice sum mann hæfde twegen suna   ? And on sumum stowum wingeardas growaþ

And ᴣiff ᴣho wass summ wædle wiff
To see his face the lion walked behind some hedge
Sumne we gesawon   Sume beoþ langsweorode swa-swa swanas
Go some of you and fetch a looking-glass
Some-one/somebody has disappeared   Some have disappeared

INDEFINITE	SG	PL	sources
	Ø	Ø	
	m	Ø	m < ONE, (INTERROG, GENERIC)
*?	Ø	m	m < QUANT, (INTERROG, GENERIC)
	m_1	m_2	m_1 < ONE; m_2 < QUANT; (m_1/m_2 < INTERROG, GENERIC)
	m_1	m_1	m_1 < ONE, **extended to PL**
	m_2	m_2	m_2 < QUANT, **extended to SG**

SG	a book-Ø	sm`book	no book	à Buach
MASS	Ø milk	sm`milk	no milk	à Muich
PL	Ø book-s	sm`book-s	no book-s	Ø Biach-à