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Typology and language change - the case of truncation

Truncation, as encountered in hypocoristic formation (e.g. Italian *Francesca > France*; French *Isabelle >Isa*) is sometimes described as erratic and outside of grammar proper (for discussion see Lappe 2007, Alber & Arndt-Lappe 2012). However, a closer look at the typology of truncation patterns reveals a highly structured system where multiple patterns in single languages are often differentiated by their relative age, geographical distribution or pragmatic connotation. Thus, in the system of Northern Italian name truncations the pattern yielding *Francesca > France* is older than the pattern *Francesca > Fra*, but younger than *Francesca > Cesca* (Boschiroli 2017). A formal typological analysis of truncation in Optimality Theory (OT) can account for the basic features of truncation and at the same time explain the observed variation of patterns in terms of minimal differences in the ranking architecture of the typological system.

A formal typological analysis of truncation in OT captures the defining traits of truncation, i.e. how much of the base of truncation is preserved in the truncated form (one syllable, two syllables, or more; cfr. *Fra* vs. *France*) and which part of the base is preserved (the left or right edge, or the stressed syllable; cfr. *Francésca > Fránce* vs. *Francésca > Césca*). The factorial typology, generated by the interaction of constraints preferring templatic sizes with constraints favoring anchoring to prominent positions, accounts for the basic patterns attested in the world's languages. We show that an analysis of the typological system in terms of *Property Theory* (PT, Alber & Prince, in prep.) determines the set of ranking conditions that bring about the observed traits. These *typological properties* - understood as the ranking conditions defining the whole of the typological system - unveil the inner workings of the grammatical machinery (Alber 2017, Alber & Arndt-Lappe, submitted).

The PT analysis can then be set to work to obtain a deeper understanding of the phenomena of variation in truncation. In a pilot study we determine the relative age of name truncations in (Belgian) French and (Tyrolean) German by asking informants via a crowdsourcing platform which age-range they attribute to certain truncation patterns. Informants complete statements of the type: 'A person whose name is abbreviated as *Isa* [for *Isabelle*] is typically X years old'. A similar study is available for Northern Italian name truncations (Boschiroli 2017). We then investigate to which extent the variation of patterns in time corresponds to minimal variation in the typological properties of the formal typological system in the PT analysis.

Truncation thus presents us with an interesting case where language change can be observed by direct inquiry, due to the fact that patterns change rather quickly. It furthermore is a rare case of observable language change in the domain of prosodic morphology, which cannot easily be explained by change triggered by misperceptions or reanalysis of ambiguous structures changing from one generation of language users to the next. Rather, language change appears to progress via minimal changes in the grammatical system, something understandable only once we have the full analysis of the typological system at hand.

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