Gap filling and its diffusion. A case study from Latin and Old Romance diachronic syntax

Mikołaj Nkollo,
Adam Mickiewicz University,
Poznań, Poland

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Aim and scope

Any account of contact-induced grammatical shift is supposed to answer, among other things, the following questions (Matras, 2011: 280):

- How does the need arise to replicate a construction that is present in a contact language using the linguistic material of the recipient language?
- How, precisely, does this replication proceed and what segments of a grammatical system of the recipient language happen to be ultimately affected?

Hypothesis

The study is going to show how the data from related languages help circumscribe the diffusion of contact-induced grammatical shift. As a hypothesis, it will be argued here that if an instance of change of this kind appears in the protolanguage, it is likely to spill over into all its descendants and to reshape at the same pace the respective segments of their grammar.

Gap filling

The case in point revolves around Latin and Old Romance reciprocal constructions. The choice of these particular form-meaning pairs is believed to elucidate some phenomena concomitant to the change known to linguists under the label of 'gap filling'

- with the replication of a category on the model of another language, the replica language may acquire a new category for which previously there was no or no appropriate equivalent (Heine & Kuteva, 2005: 124)

Reciprocal form-meaning pairs

Unlike in modern Romance, where various markers can be relatively freely interchanged with no observable semantic difference (French: *se répondent, se répondent l'un à l'autre, se répondent entre eux, s'entre-répondent, s'envoient des réponses mutuelles, s'envoient mutuellement des réponses*), in Classical Latin reiterated reciprocal form-meaning correspondences used to be semantically specialized and non-synonymous.

Selection of markers in Classical Latin: criteria

Speakers were coerced into selecting distinct kinds of repetition according to whether:

- A given relation involved exactly two or more than two parties.

- A given sentence depicted timeless states of affairs or, otherwise, its semantic content was represented as taking place at a specific moment or time interval.

Relations with no specific time reference
(two contiguous forms of the same noun)

***Cives civibus** prodesse oportet* 'It behoves citizens to be helpful to each other'

***Fratres fratribus** et **amicos amicis** iuxta esse locandos quum prelium conseritur*

'When a battle starts, brothers and friends are supposed to stand side by side.'

NB. Non-referential temporal characteristic used to go hand in hand with non-specific participant NPs.

Relations involving exactly two parties (two contiguous forms of the pronoun *alter*)

Alter alterius *iudicium reprehendit*

'They disapprove of each other's judgments'

Fratres ***alter alterum*** *adiuvant*

'The two brothers help each other'

Relations involving more than two parties (two contiguous forms of the pronoun *alius*)

Alius ex alio *causam tumltus quaerit* 'Each asks the other from where is coming the tumult'

Alios alii *deinceps excipiebant* 'They worked in relays, substituting each other'

Semantic specialization of markers

Although they are not intrinsically unlikely to overlap, all encountered examples of both *alter alterum* and *alius alium* appear in time-specific constructions. Conversely, all bipartite clusters juxtaposing two forms of the same noun communicate exclusively states of affairs represented as taking place at no specific moment.

The advent of *unus alterum*

All these clusters gradually and reluctantly began to be subsumed under one marker in late Latin, as evidenced by the following quotations:

*… dicunt **unus ad alterum**, vir ad proximum suum, loquentes*: … (Vulgate, late 4th century, *Eze*. 33, 30) 'and speak one to another each man to his neighbour, saying …'
…

*et adiunge illa **unum ad alterum** tibi in lignum unum* (Vulgate, *Eze*. 37, 17) 'And join them one to the other into one stick'.

Contributory factors

How did this change come about? It is claimed here that the subsequent advent of *unus alterum* in incipient national languages can be ultimately traced back to two concomitant facts, both language-internal and contact-induced: 1. The switch *alius > alter*; 2. The emergence of articles

The switch *alius* > *alter*. Bridging contexts

The fact of *alius* (likewise *alius alium*) being overridden by *alter* is, judging by frequencies, thought to have occurred first: (i) within the scope of negation (ii) in company of numerical expressions.

The role of negation has already been reported by Meillet (1948: 239), who quotes Ovid's sentence *Neque enim altera spes restat* ('Hence, there is no second hope' vs. 'Hence, no other hope is left') to corroborate his observations.

Associations with numbers represent another context likely to bring home to speakers how easily the difference between *alter* and *alius* is weakened. Independently of their exact meaning, conveying necessary information is efficiently taken care of by the very numeral. Conventional values of the two elements turn out irrelevant ever since.

Greek 'influence': The emergence of definite articles

The replication proceeded either as imitation of Hellenic practices in the case of native speakers of Latin, or as interference in the case of native speakers of Greek.

As documented in Greek-styled plays by Plautus (e.g. the Prologue of *Miles Gloriosus*, 2 century B.C.), the tendency manifests itself in designating characters with the aid of common nouns preceded by demonstratives (for the most part *hic* and *ille*, but also *iste*).

Demonstratives acting as definite articles. Examples from *Miles Gloriosus*

88 **illest** *miles*

105 **illam** *amicam*

109 *militi* **huic**

110 **illi** *lenae*

111-12 **is** *... miles*

120 **huic** *... militia*

127 **illum** *... meum rerum*

128 **istum** *militem*

136 **illi** *amanti suo hospiti*

As a consequence, the frequency of demonstratives highly exceeds what might have been reasonably expected in normal Latin text. In such circumstances, the demonstratives do not carry contrastive function any longer (the nouns themselves would have expressed on their own who was who).

The rise of indefinites (language-internal)

A decisive step towards the advent of the indefinite article is made when, instead of expressing the contrast: one vs. more than one, a numeral goes on to assert the occurrence of what is signified by an adjacent noun (Herslund, 2012: 343-4; Carlier, 2013: 46). In syntactic configurations with nouns, *unus, -a, -um* gave rise to specific readings.

*Accessit ad eum **una** ancilla* 'A female servant came near to him' (Vulgate, *Mat*. 26, 69)

Cumulative exponence > biuniqueness (one-meaning–one-form)

Incipient articles were crucial in that they dispensed with the need for mapping numerous functional features onto particular reciprocal markers. In Classical texts, besides expressing reciprocity, bipartite clusters used to convey such concepts as: specific vs. non-specific, numeral quantification (exactly two vs. more than two) or qualitative difference (*alius*) vs. difference between objects viewed as of essentially the same nature (*alter*).

Old Romance reciprocal constructions

These changes were strengthened by an ongoing rigidity of word-order. It comes as no surprise, then, that in Romance texts, right from the outset, < *unus alterum* expresses indiscriminately all types of reciprocity. To take a contrived Portuguese example *cives civibus* came to surface as *Cidadãos uns aos outros*, with bare NP (*cidadãos*) being meaningful.

Examples

Portuguese, 13-14th centuries (*Vidas de Santos de um Manuscrito Alcobacense*, 53r). Specific

*Ficavam os giolhos em terra e beixavon-sse **huũs aos outros** e abracavon-sse*

'They stayed down on their knees, exchanging kisses and hugs'

Portuguese, 13th century (*Foro Real*, Livro 1, Cap. 10, Folio 81r). Non-specific

*(…) manda a ley deste foro que nõ possa **hũũ por outro** testemonhyar*

'(…) it is stipulated in the present codex that they are not allowed to testify in favour of each other'

Examples

Catalan, 13th century (*Crónica de Bernat Desclot*, Capitól, CXXXIII). Non-specific

(…) *no era costum ne usansa de reys, que **la hu al altre** se besasen la ma* '(…) it was not a custom of kings to kiss each other's hand'.

Catalan, 13th century (*CdBD*, CXXVII). Specific

*Ab tant les galeres foren acostades molt prop **les hunes a les altres*** '(…) the battleships were positioned side by side at a very nearby distance from each other'.

Examples

French, 12th century (*CGr*, 3839-3841). Non-specific

*Oïl, ce ne cresra ja nus qu'il la beisast sanz fere plus que **l'une** chose **l'autre** atret* 'Indeed, nobody is going to believe that he only kissed her without going further on, as these two things entail each other'.

French, 12th century (*RdT*, 1552-1554). Specific

*Par la sale tout en parolent (...) : **L'uns a l'autre** dit en requei.* '(...) in the hall everyone is talking about it (...) People are saying to each other in secrecy'.

Layering

Old Romance texts provide one more hint on the actual status of diachronic processes that reshaped forms and functions of Classical reiterations. The case in point involves expressions which at a given synchronically circumscribed period happen to be doubly represented. Each of them can be historically traced back to one source. The existence of such pairs, familiar to linguists under the label 'layering', is construed as one of the hallmarks of grammaticalization.

Old Romance non-specific markers

Curiously, in spite of all the erosive changes described thus far early Romance documents carry on juxtaposing two nouns to express timeless reciprocity, thus reviving Latin reiterated clusters.

French, 12th century (*ChCh*; 3211-3212)

*Se cist est en ta terre seus, se li doiz conpaignie feire, Que **prodom** doit **prodom** atreire et onorer et losangier*

'If he happens to find himself alone in your estate, company should be offered to him as gentlemen are expected to attract, venerate and extol one another'

Old layer. Examples

Spanish, 14th century (*MdR*; 552)

(…) *que **fidalgo** a **fidalgo** quandol' prende, non deve dessonrarlo*

'(…) for among noblemen, when one captures another, he must not downgrade him'

Spanish, 12-13th centuries (*CMC*, 1176-1177)

*Nin da cosseio padre a fijo nin fijo a padre Nin **amigo** a **amigo** nos pueden con solar*

'(…) neither are friends able to console each other'

Old layer. Examples

Portuguese, 13-14th centuries (*Vidas de Santos de um Manuscrito Alcobacense*)

(...) *ca o* **homem** *nõ ha poder de hedificar out(ro)* **homẽ**

'(...) people don't have power to edify each other'.

Portuguese, 13th century (*Foro Real*, Livro 1, Capítulo 10, Fólio 81r)

E todo **parente** *por seu* **parente** *possa ata aquel graao (...)* **testemonhyar** 'relatives are allowed to testify in favour of each other to that extent (...)'

Old layer. Examples

Catalan, 13th century (*Declaració de vassallatge dels castells d'Alquer i Montclús*)

(...) *faç pleyt et homenatge de mans et de boca a vos dit Fferran Rruyç, com home* **fidalgo** *lo deu fer a* **fidalgo,** *en nom et en veu del sobredit Senyor Rey Don Sancho*

'On behalf of aforementioned King Sancho, hereby I take an oath with my mouth and with my hands towards you, Fferran Rruyç, as noblemen are expected to do towards each other'

Concluding remarks

All in all, data drawn from several languages help predict the following points of interest in the diffusion of gap filling from replica parent language to its successors:

- its areal scope shows no significant gaps likely to resist a new structure
- its pace, in spite of possible longevity in target languages of alternative mechanisms, either inherited or idiomatic, is the same all round
- if a restructuring happens to affect other grammatical subsystems in the recipient parent language, it is spilt over into the same grammatical segments in languages stemming from it

Thank you

Happy

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CICA. Corpus Informatizat del Català Antic

http://www.cica.cat/

CIPM. Corpus informatizado do português medieval

http://cipm.fcsh.unl.pt

DECT. Dictionnaire éléctronique de Chrétien de Troyes. **ATILF**

http://www.atilf.fr/dect

HSMS. Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies – Digital Library of Old Spanish Texts

http://www.hispanicseminary.org/textconc-en.htm

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