
Case marking variation – an evolutionary perspective

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Jäger (2007) developed a game-theoretic model that involves the formalization of case marking strategies in terms of encoding-decoding processes. The analytic component of Jäger's study is the detection of evolutionarily stable case marking systems under evolutionary dynamics. His analysis shows that exactly those case marking systems are *evolutionarily stable* (Maynard Smith 1982) – thus particularly resistant against forces of change –, which are predominant among the languages of the world (cf. Bickel & Nichols 2008). Their frequent presence can therefore be explained on the basis of insights from evolutionary game theory, such as the notions of evolutionary stability. However, the model struggles to motivate the strategies and parameters in the cognitive constraints of the individual agents, as determined by so-called “processing cues” (cf. the *Competition Model* by MacWhinney & Bates 1989). The interaction of these cues varies across languages (cf. *ibid.*) and the language-specific weighting (*cue strength*) depends on *cue validity* (measuring how helpful a given cue actually is in determining an interpretation). Together, the Competition model and a game-theoretic model for communication will allow for providing new insights into the evolutionary emergence and development of ideal *actor identification strategies*, from both a neurocognitive and a communicative perspective. In our talk, we will present a game-theoretic model that extends Jäger's (2007) work by implementing processing cues in order to determine whether the model can detect the same case systems as evolutionarily stable as are also detected by the original model. In total, the talk will give new insights into ranges and boundaries of the diversity and change of case marking systems.

References: • Bates, E. & B. MacWhinney (1989): Functionalism and the competition model. In B. MacWhinney & E. Bates (eds.), *The Crosslinguistic Study of Sentence Processing*. CUP, 3–73. • Bickel, B. & J. Nichols (2008): Case marking and alignment. In A. Malchukov & A. Spencer (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Case*. OUP, 304–321. • Jäger, G. (2007): Evolutionary game theory and typology: A case study. *Language* 83(1), 74–109.