

WHERE DO MOTIVATIONS COMPETE?

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This paper takes as a starting point the following two ideas. The first is that major aspects of natural language morphosyntax are motivated by external functional pressure on grammars, such as pressure for rapid parsing and pressure for form and meaning to be kept in alignment. The second is that these external pressures can 'compete' with each other, in the sense that they can pull grammars in different directions. The paper is devoted to identifying the locus of this competition. There are, broadly speaking, two positions on this issue, which I call 'direct competition' (DC) and 'indirect competition' (IC):

'Direct competition' (DC): There is direct synchronic linkage between properties of particular grammars and functional motivations for those properties. Hence the competing factors are 'registered' internally to grammars.

'Indirect competition' (IC): There is no direct linkage between external functions and grammatical properties. The competition between external factors is played out in language use and acquisition and (therefore) language change and is manifested only typologically.

DC is implicit or explicit in a wide variety of approaches to syntax, ranging from much of mainstream functional syntax, which attributes great importance to functionally-motivated hierarchies, to the approach known as 'emergent grammar', and to many implementations of optimality theory. The purpose of the paper, however, is to defend IC. A number of considerations support IC over DC:

1. DC underplays or ignores the role of conventionality as an explanatory factor. A structure may enter a language primarily to serve a particular function, but be retained by that language by force of conventionality even after that function ceases to be served.
2. DC exaggerates the function-drivenness of language change. An important result of historical sociolinguistics is that social factors are more important than (user-based) functional ones in the propagation of a change.
3. DC is forced to downplay the (nonfunctional, in the ordinary use of the term) structural-systematic pressures on grammars.
4. DC has difficulty dealing with the incidentally dysfunctional consequences of an otherwise functionally-motivated change (e.g. Lightfoot's discussion of the strategies that languages develop for extracting subjects).

The paper concludes by sketching a view of grammars consistent with IC. The centerpiece of the argument is an analogy between grammars and pathological

conditions such as lung cancer. We can pinpoint smoking as a cause of lung cancer in general, even though the complexity of any pathology prevents us from conclusively attributing any individual case to smoking. Along the same lines, we can pinpoint parsing ease, iconicity, etc. as motivating factors for grammatical structure, even though, contra DC, there is no hope of identifying parsing or iconicity as motivators for particular structures or rules in particular languages.