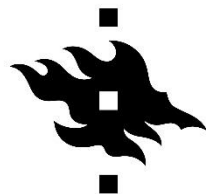


Introducing the ERC Starting Grant project “Linguistic Adaptation” and the team

Kaius Sinnemäki (PI)

Jan 24, 2020

University of Helsinki



UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI



European Research Council
Established by the European Commission

Plan

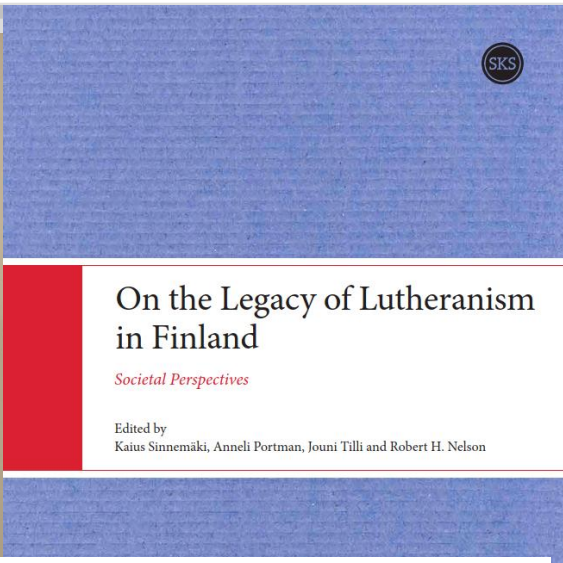
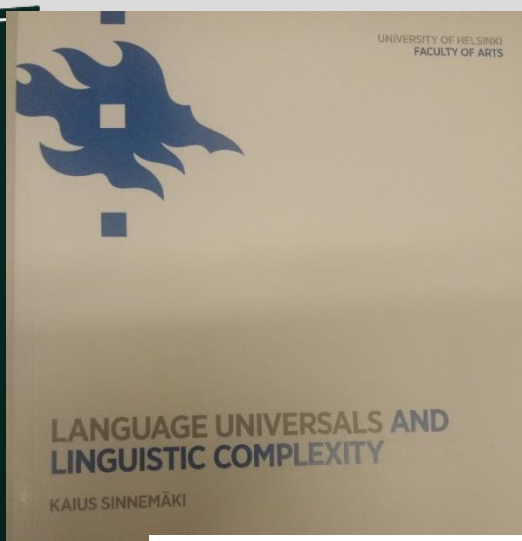
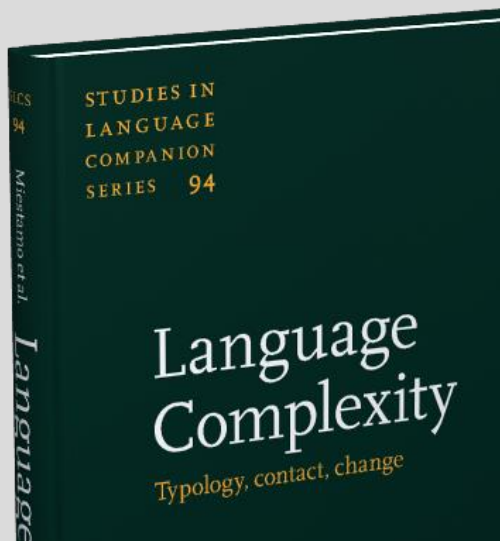
- Introduction to the project and the team
- Francesca Di Garbo
Linguistic variation and adaptation in nominal morphosyntax: some insights from previous and ongoing research
- Eri Kashima
Variation and descriptive sociolinguistics from Southern New Guinea
- Ricardo Napoleão de Souza
Phonetic variation and (morpho)phonological change from cross-linguistic and typological perspectives
- Refreshments

Basic information

- Project title:
*Linguistic Adaptation:
Typological and Sociolinguistic Perspectives to Language Variation*
- Funded by the European Research Council 2019–2023.
- Hosted at the Department of Languages, UH
 - Focus area on linguistic and cultural diversity.
- Web: <https://www.helsinki.fi/en/researchgroups/linguistic-adaptation>.

Basic information

- PI: Kaius Sinnemäki, assoc. prof. in quantitative and comparative linguistics
- Academic identities:
 1. (general) linguist: typology, contact & change, quantitative methods, sociolinguistics, learning & processing, corpus linguistics
 2. historian
 3. (digital) humanist



DE GRUYTER MOUTON
DOI 10.1515/ling-2013-0063 — Linguistics 2014; 52(2): 281–313

Kaius Sinnemäki
A typological perspective on Differential Object Marking

On the Legacy of Lutheranism in Finland
Societal Perspectives

Edited by
Kaius Sinnemäki, Anneli Portman, Jouni Tili and Robert H. Nelson

ORIGINAL RESEARCH
published: 14 August 2018
doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01141



Chapter 4

On the distribution and complexity of gender and numeral classifiers

Kaius Sinnemäki
University of Helsinki

Language Structures May Adapt to the Sociolinguistic Environment, but It Matters What and How You Count: A Typological Study of Verbal and Nominal Complexity

Kaius Sinnemäki¹ and Francesca Di Garbo^{2*}

¹ Department of Languages, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland, ² Department of Linguistics, Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden

KATSAUS

Digitaaliset ihmistieteet tutkimus-

■ Kaius Sinnemäki ja Mikko Tolonen

KAIUS SINNEMÄKI
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6972-5216>

Word order in zero-marking languages

JANNE SAARIKIVI

Kaius Sinnemäki
University of Helsinki

Sacred Language: Reformation, Nationalism, and Linguistic Culture

Focus Article

Cognitive processing, language typology, and variation

Kaius Sinnemäki*



Starting point of the project

- Plenty of evidence for adaptation in many areas of human behaviour (Nettle 2009, 2012; Boyd, Richerson & Henrich 2011).
 - From child rearing to habitat and from subsistence to diet.
- But *the mainstream view* in linguistics has been that the human capacity for adaptation does not concern language.
 - Attempts to establish a link between language structure and e.g. social environment approached with disbelief (e.g., Kaye 1989; Newmeyer 2002).

Driving question

Do linguistic structures systematically adapt to sociolinguistic environment in the world's languages?

→Linguistic adaptation

Kinds of hypotheses:

- small isolated languages
 - deviations from transparency
- large languages in heavy contact
 - greater structural transparency

I hypothesize there are systematic traces in the data that support linguistic adaptation.

On adaptation

- A process whereby linguistic structures may become systematically adjusted to
 1. other linguistic structures or (“language internal” effects)
 - interaction of case and word order in distinguishing ‘who is doing what to whom’.
 2. to some aspect of the language’s ecology (“external” effects)
 - We focus on sociolinguistic ecology
 - e.g., when one structure is preferably selected in a sociolinguistic context and passed to the next generation.

Evidence

- Earlier research: number of nominal cases affected by
 - Popul. size (Lupyan & Dale 2010)

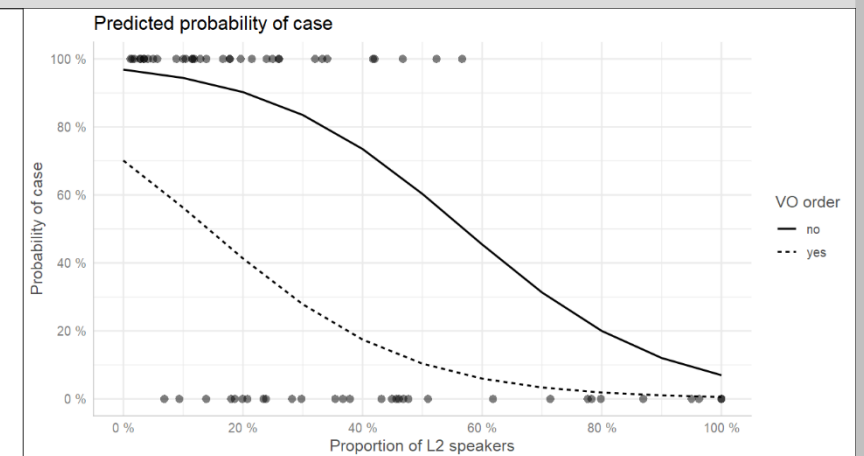
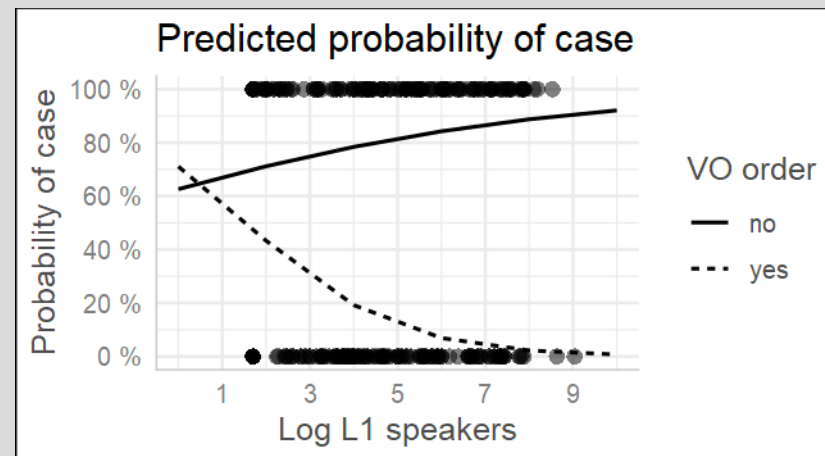
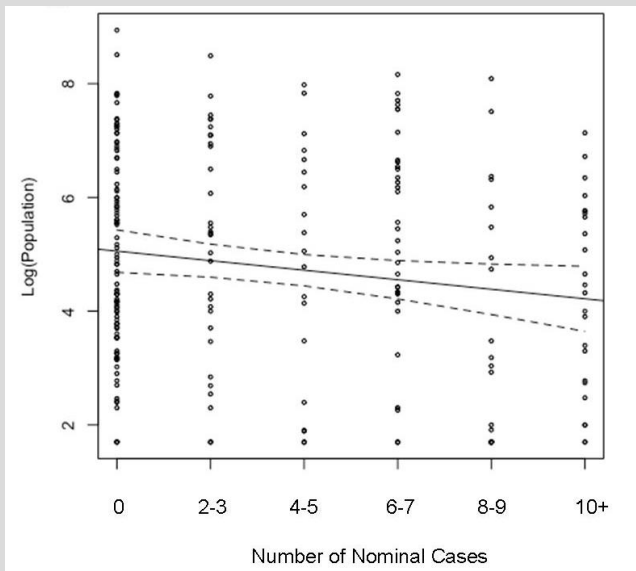
- But: languages with subject-object-verb order → nominal cases.
 - E.g., Turkish, Quechua, Lisu,

Lisu (Burmese; Palmer 1994: 24)

Ása nya zànwe lǽ syi-a.

Asa (S) top child (O) **obj** put.to.bed-decl (V)

'Asa put the child to bed.'



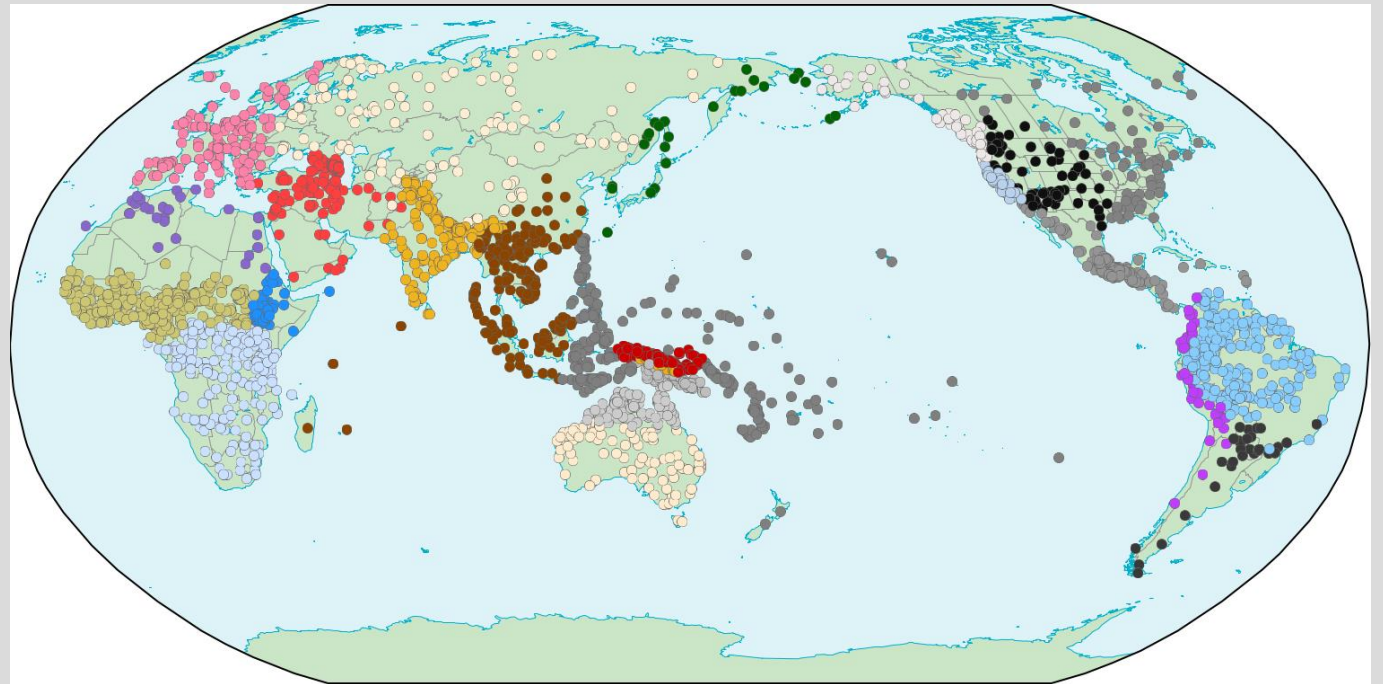
Objectives & outcomes

Objective 1: theoretical framework

- to develop a methodological approach that makes it possible to combine grammatical and sociolinguistic data into the same model and to statistically research their relationship.
- Challenge to address
 - typology usually macro-level: corpus-driven typology not possible in this project.
 - Sociolinguistic descriptions are typically micro-level.
- Review the mechanisms proposed in the literature for linguistic adaptation.

Objective 2: testing hypotheses

- to understand the degree and nature of linguistic adaptation in the world's languages and whether it is independent of language-internal structural tendencies,
- Sample languages “in bundles”.
 - Many languages from the same geographic region and language family.
→ Enables testing patterns within families.



Objective 3: analysis of typological data

- to analyze 3-4 broad linguistic categories that are susceptible to respond to changes in sociolinguistic in 150 languages
 - e.g., case, gender, number; definiteness
- Probing also into phonological features
- Restructuring (e.g., in gender paradigms) as an instance of simplification
- Paradigm size vs. transparency.

Objective 4: analysis of sociolinguistic data

- to analyze 3-4 sociolinguistic factors that are likely to drive changes in linguistic structures (contact vs. isolation, multilingualism, community size, prestige), aim is 150 speech communities.

- Sociolinguistics is more than demography!
 - Pace earlier quantitative work.

- Novel concept:

Comparative social concepts

(adapt e.g., Haspelmath 2010)



- Research data
 - Sociolinguistic questionnaire
 - Collaborate w/experts on families and areas
 - Edit a volume on sociolinguistic descriptions
 - Fill in sociolinguistic database
- Workshop “Grammatical Adaptation - Strategies and Methods”, March 25-27, 2020
 - Walter Bisang, Pierpaolo Di Carlo, Nina Dobrushina, Vera Kempe, Itxaso Rodríguez-Ordóñez, Rosa Vallejos, ...
 - Save the date; more information to follow

Objective 4: analysis of sociolinguistic data

- to analyze 3-4 sociolinguistic factors that are likely to drive changes in linguistic structures (contact vs. isolation, multilingualism, community size, prestige), aim is 150 speech communities.
- Sociolinguistics is more than demography!
 - Pace earlier quantitative work.
- Novel concept:
Comparative social concepts

(adapt e.g., Haspelmath 2010)

1. Social norms
2. Descriptive (social) categories
3. Comparative (social) concepts
→ Typological variables

Outcomes

- Theory
 - A new approach to combining variation across languages and communities.
 - Evidence for linguistic adaptations (?)
- Methods
 - Develop new methods for comparative sociolinguistics.
 - New diagnostics for language contact.
 - Adapt methods for testing linguistic adaptations.
 - Bayesian mixed effects; phylogenetic regression.
- Data
 - Open publication of new typological and sociolinguistic database.