

## **Inflectional complexity in closely related (non-)isolated varieties**

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Introduction: The operationalization of structural (in particular inflectional) complexity has become a focus of interest in recent typological work. At the same time, it has been claimed that languages spoken by small, isolated communities tend to show greater degrees of complexity (Braunmüller 1984, Nichols 2009, Trudgill 2009). If this is correct, the tendency should be observable not only on the basis of large-scale comparison of genetically distant languages, but also in clusters of closely related varieties with different degrees of isolation. Furthermore, it should also appear as a diachronic tendency in languages with a well attested history: Complexification is expected to occur in varieties spoken by isolated communities, whereas simplification is expected to occur in larger communities with extensive contact. The present paper first establishes an operational complexity metric suitable for microvariation and then puts to test the isolation hypothesis, examining highly inflecting varieties of German from both a diachronic and comparative perspective.

Method: Existing proposals for complexity metrics in the typological literature allow for operationalization but are too coarse in order to account for differences between closely related varieties (Nichols 2006, Shosted 2006). On the other hand, studies which go more deeply into morphological detail refrain from a rigorous and crosslinguistically consistent quantification of complexity (Dammel/Kürschner 2008, Kusters 2003). Recent microcomparative work on the complexity of English varieties (Szmrecsanyi/Kortmann 2009) is clearly quantificational but only marginally addresses the specific problems posed by highly inflecting languages. Therefore, we have developed a complexity metric which is quantificational, crosslinguistically applicable to inflecting languages and of sufficient granularity for the purposes of morphological microvariation.

We have determined complexity indices for noun, adjective and article inflection (number, case) in five varieties: Old High German, New High German (=Standard German), the Alemannic dialects of Kaiserstuhl, Visperterminen, and Issime. Whereas only the latter two are topographically isolated, only the dialect of Issime (an enclave in Romance-speaking surroundings) is under intensive language contact.

Hypotheses: We expect (starting from OHG) simplification in NHG and Kaiserstuhl Alemannic but complexification in Visperterminen Alemannic. As for Issime Alemannic, the expectations are ambiguous: simplification due to intensive contact with Romance varieties or complexification due to Issime's isolation from the West-Germanic dialect continuum?

Results: Summing up the complexity indices of the three parts of speech (=overall complexity), we observe a general diachronic tendency towards simplification in the four recent varieties, whereby in NHG and Kaiserstuhl Alemannic inflectional morphology is simplified most extensively. Therefore the predictions following from the isolation hypothesis are borne out at the level of microcomparative evidence.

Comparing the dialects to Standard German we can observe that Visperterminen and Issime Alemannic are more complex than Standard German, but Kaiserstuhl Alemannic is less complex. Thus codification does not predict anything about complexity.

Visperterminen Alemannic is slightly more complex than Issime Alemannic. Therefore language contact could have a simplifying effect.