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Abstracts:

PRINCIPLES OF EVENT SEGMENTATION IN LANGUAGE: THE CASE OF MOTION EVENTS

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We examine universals and cross-linguistic variation in constraints on event segmentation. Previous typological studies have focused on segmentation into syntactic (Pawley 1987) or intonational units (Givón 1991). We argue that the correlation between such units and semantic/conceptual event representations is language-specific. As an alternative, we introduce the MACRO-EVENT PROPERTY (MEP): a construction has the MEP if it packages event representations such that temporal operators necessarily have scope over all subevents. A case study on the segmentation of motion events into macro-event expressions in eighteen genetically and typologically diverse languages has produced evidence of two types of design principles that impact motion event segmentation: language-specific lexicalization patterns and universal constraints on form-to-meaning mapping.

AT LEAST ET AL.: THE SEMANTICS OF SCALAR MODIFIERS

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On the naive account of scalar modifiers like *more than* and *at least*, *At least three girls snored* is synonymous with *More than two girls snored*, and both sentences mean that the number of snoring girls exceeded two (the same, *mutatis mutandis*, for sentences with *at most* and *less/fewer than*). We show that this is false and propose an alternative theory, according to which superlative modifiers (*at least/most*) are quite different from comparative ones (*more/less/fewer than*). Whereas the naive theory is basically right about comparative modifiers, it is wrong about superlative modifiers, which we claim have a MODAL meaning: an utterance of *At least three girls snored* conveys two things: first, that it is CERTAIN that there was a group of three snoring girls, and second, that more than four girls MAY have snored. We argue that this analysis explains various facts that are problematic for the naive view, which have to do with specificity, distributional differences between superlative and comparative modifiers, differential patterns of inference licensed by these expressions, and the way they interact with various operators, like modals and negation.

LANGUAGE CHANGE ACROSS THE LIFESPAN: /R/ IN MONTREAL FRENCH

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We address the articulation between language change in the historical sense and language change as experienced by individual speakers through a trend and panel study of the change from apical to dorsal /r/ in Montreal French. The community as a whole rapidly advanced its use of dorsal [R]. Most individual speakers followed across time were stable after the critical period, with phonological patterns set by the end of adolescence. A sizeable minority, however, made substantial changes. The window of opportunity for linguistic modification in later life may be expanded with rapid change in progress when linguistic variables take on social significance.

EVIDENTIALITY AND DOUBLE TENSE IN MATSES

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The Matses language of the Panoan family, spoken in Amazonian Peru and Brazil, has one of the most intricate evidential systems ever described, requiring speakers to precisely and explicitly code their source of information every time they report a past event. In a typologically unique inflectional configuration that I call DOUBLE TENSE the speakers specify both i) how long ago an inferred event happened and ii) how long ago the evidence upon which the inference was made was encountered. The present paper explores in detail the Matses evidential system, focusing on several novel patterns relevant to the typological study of evidentiality and providing social and historical perspectives.

SHORT REPORT: FORTY YEARS OF LANGUAGE CHANGE ON MARTHA'S VINEYARD

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This short report presents results from a replication of Labov's study of language variation and language change in progress on Martha's Vineyard (MV). The original paper was revolutionary in many respects: it established that the relationship between social and linguistic variables could be systematically studied, and put forward the construct of apparent time as a means of inferring diachronic change in progress based on synchronic patterns. By drawing on Labov's methods for a restudy of MV forty years later, we establish (i) the validity of apparent-time inferencing, and (ii) the robustness of social indexing for the (ay) and (aw) variables on MV. The results strengthen both methodological and theoretical principles that have become central to (socio)linguistics.

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