Language fragmentation and endogenous change

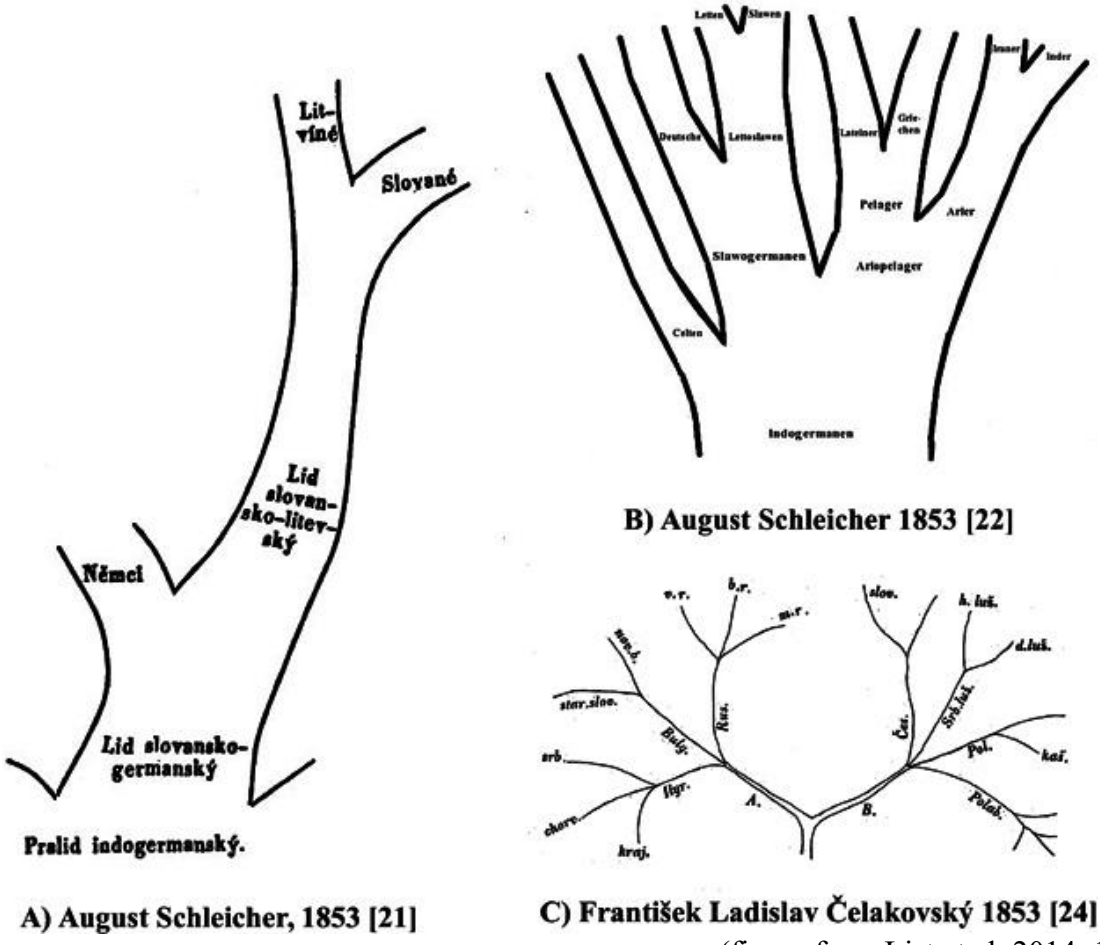
Organizers
Marc Olivier (marc.olivier-loiseau@tcd.ie), Trinity College Dublin
Afra Pujol i Campeny (afra.pujolcampeny@udg.edu), Universitat de Girona

Language change inevitably gives rise to new linguistic systems. This workshop addresses the issue of fragmentation: the process by which two or more linguistic communities within a given linguistic system develop idiosyncratic, or distinct, linguistic systems. We seek to explore the endogenous mechanisms that give rise to the divergent representations of a particular grammar, to the widening gulf between what was once a single language, with the aim of improving our understanding of the locus of fragmentation; what formal traits render a system more or less prone to evolve in different directions; the different ways in which it can be modelled, formalised, and represented; and how fragmentation can be diachronically reconstructed.

The extralinguistic conditions that give rise to fragmentation often stem from geographical isolation, whether because a subpart of the community relocates to a different continent or because a dividing wall is built through a city. Once physical separation occurs, linguistic fragmentation follows and affects all language domains: phonology, prosody, morphology, syntax, and so on.

We distinguish between 'fragmented variety' and 'ancestral variety'. The former (i.e., fragment) denotes a linguistic variety that, following the separation of a previously unified speech community, has developed a grammar noticeably distinct from that of the source community. The latter (i.e., the ancestral variety) denotes the variety from which the fragment geographically originated, that is, it is the variety that constituted the source at the time of separation, though it may itself have since undergone change. To illustrate, 17th-18th-century British English is a source variety that gave rise to American English, a fragmented variety, and present-day British English, the ancestral variety.

This issue was first brought to light in the philological scholarship of the 19th century, in the works of August Schleicher (1821–1868) and František Ladislav Čelakovský (1759–1852), notably through the study of the Indo-European family and how it split into its constituent subfamilies, languages, and dialects. The tree model, while simplistic and agnostic with respect to other crucial parameters such as language contact and multilingualism, captures a palpable reality: once a linguistic community is divided, fragmentation follows.



(figure from List et al. 2014: 142)

The merits and pitfalls of Schleicher's (1853) *Stambaumtheorie* continue to be discussed and compared to this day. The last two decades have seen significant advances in the modelling of linguistic fragmentation, be it by proposing innovative uses of the Stammbaumtheorie and Wellentheorie, for instance, in François' (2014) historical glottometric approach, or phylogenetic approaches that borrow from evolutionary biology, such as Bayesian maximum-likelihood methods (Dunn et al. 2008), network analyses (Forster, Toth and Bandelt's 1998), or the Parametric Comparative Method of Longobardi & Guardiano (2009). To what extent can these methods capture processes of divergence in contexts of linguistic isolation?

Works on exogenous factors, such as language contact, provide a key to unlock our understanding of language change (see Willis 2017 on the role of exogenous factors in transmission). Trudgill (2020), for instance, argues that the rate of change is significantly influenced by social factors such as geographical isolation/contact and social stability/instability. Yet this emphasis on contact-driven explanations leaves the converse case comparatively underexplored: the role of endogenous factors in language change in non-contact contexts still presents us with many unanswered questions. What are the drivers of change in a fragmented variety?

Fragmentation creates contrast, whereby a linguistic phenomenon (broadly defined) can be characterised as either archaic (i.e., it has remained stable) or innovative (i.e., it deviates from the source). The former is inherited from the original linguistic community whereas the latter is a novelty. A fragmented variety, therefore, can arise for one of two reasons: either by virtue of being archaising, in contrast to the original community that shows innovations, or by virtue of developing separate innovations. As a direct consequence, fragmentation becomes a question of measurement and delimiting how much archaism or innovation is enough to mark

the birth of a distinct variety. A further question concerns the rate at which fragmented varieties change relative to the source community, and whether this rate is predictable.

It is widely accepted that linguistic drift (Sapir 2021) is a force behind language change. The parametric framework and the concept of cascading parametric change might offer insights on drift rate and directionality (Biberauer & Roberts 2008). However, case studies show that while fragmented varieties and their ancestral varieties had the same initial structural (and by extension, parametric) make-up, they do not drift in the same direction or at the same rate (a good example is the persistence of case in Icelandic vs. mainland Scandinavian varieties, Eythórsson 2000). If endogenous language change is partly due to a linguistic drift determined by a variety's formal structure, why does change in fragmented varieties not follow the same direction or rate as in ancestral ones?

Studies of language change show that different domains of language are more susceptible to contact than others. This is formalised in Thomason & Kaufman's (1988) borrowing scale, which places content words among the elements most likely to be borrowed, while morphological and syntactic features are less readily borrowed and typically require more intense contact. However, we do not know whether fragmented varieties are more likely to exhibit change in domains that are also more likely to change in the context of contact, such as the lexicon (as suggested in Padilla Iglesias et al. 2020), or in others, like phonology, morphology, or syntax. An example of a fragmented variety undergoing change in a less likely domain, from a contact perspective, is Balearic Catalan, an insular variety that fragmented from mainland Catalan, where stress shift from the main word to the clitic cluster of verb-clitic compounds was innovated in Mallorca during the late modern era, as part of a shift in the prosody and phonology of the variety (Torres-Tamarit & Pons-Moll 2019).

Examples of linguistic fragmentation driven by endogenous change include Icelandic, which fragmented from continental Old Norse a millennium ago and evolved at a relatively slow pace and with little contact with mainland Scandinavian (Friðriksson 2008; Trudgill 2020). The high degree of conservatism of this language in comparison to Norwegian, Swedish, or Danish, also from Old Norse, makes it an interesting case of archaising variety. Another example of endogenous change giving rise to a new variety is Tristan da Cunha English (Trudgill 1986; Schreier 2003), the most isolated anglophone island on the planet. This variety shows innovation in its phonology, having lost voiced fricatives, and in its morphosyntax, through the simplification of inflection morphology (e.g., *she sing*). Fragmentation does not necessarily feature a great geographical distance: Korean, now shared out between two neighbouring countries that do not interact with each other, has given rise to increasingly different varieties (see Yun and Kang 2019 on phonological change). While the extralinguistic conditions surrounding Icelandic, Tristan da Cunha English, and North/South Korean may differ, the linguistic result converges: they take roots in a language community from which they have fragmented, and have since become noticeably different due to internal changes.

This workshop's primary objective is to examine the processes and mechanisms underlying fragmentation, with a view to better understanding how linguistic change unfolds when exogenous factors cannot be invoked. The research questions below evoke several ways in which this matter can be approached.

1. How can we model language fragmentation?
2. How much archaism or innovation must accumulate before a fragment counts as a distinct variety, and can this be formally measured?
3. What are the drives behind endogenous change?
4. Does endogenous change hit the same linguistic domains (lexicon first, syntax last) as contact-driven change, or does isolation reorder which domains change most?
5. Why do fragments and their ancestral varieties drift in different directions and at different rates despite sharing the same parametric starting point?

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