

Creativity and language change in grammar

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Abstract

Each and every kind of grammatical change begins with an innovation at the discourse level. While there are many innovations that only exist for a short time before disappearing again, others establish themselves in the language system. But what characteristics must a construction have in order to ultimately be adopted by a language community? In other words: what makes creativity successful?

We will explore these questions together using examples from French, Spanish, German and English. With a focus on grammatical constructions, we will discuss mechanisms of linguistic innovation as well as processes of diffusion and conventionalization. In doing so, ‘failed’ constructions play just as important a role as ‘successful’ ones.

At the end of the course, participants will be able to describe diachronic processes from the initial innovation to conventionalization and explain both diffusion and decline based on internal and external factors.