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Reflections on some universal processes leading to changes in languages round the world*

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The first phenomena to be mentioned here are *umlaut* (also called *mutation*) and *vowel harmony*, which we consider as two opposite processes, the former being about regressive vowel assimilation, whereas the latter works progressively. However they have one thing in common, as in both of them attraction of vocalic sounds goes hand in hand with equalization of their levels, or grades. In the history of the Germanic languages, including English, one of the most common kinds of *umlaut* was the *i-umlaut*[1] which resulted in certain anomalies in the area of the noun, and to be more specific, in the creation of plural forms of a number of nouns (cf. Fausto 1980). The reconstructed Proto-Germanic masculine plural ending is **-iz* and when it was added to singular forms of nouns, the **-i-* sound from **-iz*, being a high front vowel, attracted towards its region other vowels, like *a*, *o*, *u*,and thus caused their fronting. For example, when to the Proto-Germanic word stem **man-*, obtained from the singular form of the noun **mannaz*, the plural ending **-iz* was added, the form **manniz* was obtained (cf. Smith 2009). What happened then was a gradual mutation of the root vowel **-a-* because it was attracted towards the region of the final**-i* from**-iz*, and after a time, involving several centuries, it finally became *-e-*, of course upon going through some intermediate stages. The final result of this process can be observed in the English

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[1] The different kinds of *umlauts* are named according to the sounds that cause vowel mutations. Since in the kind of umlaut in question it is the *-i-* sound that causes mutation, it is called *i-umlaut*. Accordingly, we can also distinguish *a-umlaut*, *u-umlauts*, etc. which have operated for example in Scandinavian languages (See Gordon 1981). Also see: Online Etymology Dictionary, *I-mutation* – https://www.etymonline.com/columns/post/imutate [Accessed: 10 II 2021].

word *men*, which is the plural of *man* and in the German word *Männer*, the plural of *Mann*. A similar process occurred in such English nouns as *foot* (sg.) > *feet* (pl.), *goose* (sg.) > *geese* (pl.), and in the following German nouns *Tochter* (sg.) >*Töchter* (pl.), *Mutter* (sg.) > *Mütter* (pl.), *Kraft* (sg.) > *Kräfte* (pl.), etc. It needs to be added that as regards the above-mentioned English nouns, except *men*, they underwent further phonological modifications during the Great Vowel Shift (GVS) which operated in the Middle English Period and slightly afterwards (cf. Wolfe 1972). Among other things, it was responsible for the raising of long /o:/ to long /u:/ and of long /e:/ to long /i:/ in *foot*, *goose* and in *feet*, *geese* respectively, although the spelling reflects the pronunciation from the pre-GVS times. An opposite process to *vowel mutation*, or *umlaut*, is vowel harmony, a forward vocalic assimilation, whereby the stem vowels, or the ones in the immediately preceding syllables of compound words, determine the quality of the vowels of the suffixes. This process can be found in Finnish and Hungarian, which by the way are two Finno-Ugric languages that are related genetically. Generally speaking, in vowel harmony on the one hand if the stem, or the immediately preceding syllable, contains a back vowel the suffix will also have a back vowel, and on the other hand if the stem, or the immediately preceding syllable, contains a front vowel the suffix will accordingly have a front vowel. For example, the interrogative suffix in Finnish has the form *-ko* if in the stem, or in the immediately preceding syllable, there is a back vowel (*u*, *o* or *a*), whereas it assumes the fronted form *-kö* if in the stem, or in the immediately preceding syllable, there is a front vowel (*y*, *ö* or *ä*). This can be illustrated by the following: *kartta* 'a map' > *karttako?* 'a map?' vs *minä* 'I', 'me' > *minäkö?* 'I?', 'me?' (cf. Aaltio 1971).

As regards the process of lenition, it can lead to devoicing, fricativization, reduction or even complete loss of a consonantal sound. An example of lenition is what is generally described as the First Germanic Sound Shift in Germanic languages formulated in 1822 by Jakob Grimm. After Proto-Germanic (PG) had split from the Proto-Indo-European (PIE) language somewhat before the start of the Anno Domini (AD) period, i.e. the New Era, it introduced a number of changes that made it different from other Indo-European dialects which also split from PIE but which nevertheless continued its original features (like for example Latin, Greek, Polish or Sanskrit). One of such changes was a general lenition experienced by certain PG consonants inherited from PIE. There are three main observations that Grimm made (cf. Lehmann 2007): 1. certain PIE voiceless stops (*/p/, */t/, */k/) became voiceless

fricatives (*/f/, */θ/, */x/) respectively in PG; 2. certain PIE voiced stops (*/b/, */d/, */g/) became voiceless (*/p/, */t/, */k/) respectively in PG; 3. certain PIE voiced aspirated stops (*/bh/, */dh/, */gh/) became voiced stops (*/b/, */d/, */g/) respectively in PG. Examples of the first kind of change are as follows: the PIE */p/, continued in the Latin word *piscis*, became PG */f/, continued in the English cognate word *fish*; the PIE */t/, continued in the Latin word *trēs* became PG */θ/, continued in the English cognate word *three*; and the PIE */k/ continued in the Latin word *cor, cordis*, became PG */x/, continued in the English cognate word *heart*. Lenition can also be observed in the final consonants of Polish and German words. Although in these languages the final consonants are voiced plosives, they are generally devoiced, i.e. lenited. For example, in the Polish noun *gołąb* 'dove', the final voiced plosive /b/ is normally pronounced as voiceless /p/ in natural, unexaggerated pronunciation. Similarly, in the German noun *Tag* 'day', the final voiced plosive /g/ is normally pronounced as voiceless plosive /k/ in natural speech. It is unlike in English, in which devoicing would lead to change in meaning, which could in turn lead to misunderstandings. In this language, it is not recommended to devoice final voiced plosives in words like *bad*, *god*, *flog*, etc. because the interlocutor might take them for *bat*, *got* and *flock* respectively. Lenition is a common phenomenon in Irish Gaelic (see Ó'Domhnalláin 2006; Doyle & Gussman 1997). In this language there are a number of words that cause lenition of the initial consonants in the words immediately following. For example, the word *an* 'very' is one of such words. If it precedes the adjective *beog* 'small', the initial voiced plosive /b/ is pronounced as the voiced fricative /v/, which is reflected in the spelling by adding the letter *h* as in *an-bheog*. Similarly, the voiceless fricative /f/ in the word *fuar* 'cold' is even reduced to zero, i.e, not pronounced at all, when preceded by *an*, which is reflected in the spelling by placing the letter *h* after *f* asin *an fhuar*.

Regarding grammaticalization, Traugott & König (1991) definethis proces as 'the dynamic, unidirectional historical process whereby lexical items in the course of time acquire a new status as grammatical, morphosyntactic forms, and in the process come to code relations that either were not coded before or were coded differently'. Grammaticalization seems to be a universal process which can practically be found in any language of the world. Here only a few examples regarding the expression of the future will be given from Indo-European. To start with, the Old English verb *willan* 'to desire', 'to want', 'to wish', lost its original meaning and now functions as

an auxiliary verb *will* used in future tenses, whereas the empty slot for expressing desires and wishes was filled in by the word *want*. In German however the original meaning of the verb *wollen*, the equivalent of OE *willan*, is still fully preserved and the future auxiliary verb in this language is *werden*, a cognate with Latin *verto* 'to turn', 'to revolve' and Polish *wiercić* 'to drill'. As a matter of fact the English *will* is at the same time a modal verb and in certain contexts it preserves its original meaning, like for example in: 1) *help me, if you will*; 2) *will you help me?*; 3) *open the door for me, will you?* In Swedish, on the other hand, the marker of futurity is *ska*, which is cognate with the Modern English modal verb *shall* and Modern German *sollen*. As regards Balkan languages, according to Mirić (2010), there are two ways in which the future tense, an example of grammaticalization, is formed in them: with the verbs 'want' and 'have', whose use varies functionally and territorially in different Balkanlanguage srepresenting the Balkan Sprachbund; also referred to as the Balkan Linguistic League (see Friedman 2017). The most discussed is the Balkan future expressed with a construction which originally derives from a volitional verb meaning 'want' (generally termed as *volo*) being followed by an infinitive or subjunctive construction (e.g. in the South-Eastern Serbian dialects: *će/ću ti pošaljem knjigu* 'I will send you the book'). This kind of construction is usually known under the name 'de-volitive future'. There is another construction, to which however less attention has been paid, and which originally derives from the verb meaning 'have' (generally termed as *habeo*), like for example in Albanian *kam përtëshkruar*, Greek έχο να γράφω /echo na grfō/, Romanian *amsăscriu*, Macedonian *imam da pišam* ('I will write' / 'I have to write') (Mirić 2010; after Thau-Knudsen 1998: 65).

Grammaticalization can also be found in the expression of the optative mood. In Polish for example, the particle *bodaj* 'let' derives from *bog daj* lit. 'Godgive', whereas the corresponding Spanish *ojalá* and Portuguese *oxalá* derive from the Arabic expression *inshallah* 'Godwilling' coming from *in šāʾa l-lahu* (lit. 'if wished God'; to be found for example in the Qur'ān: 18:69 and 37:102)[2], which also contains the word for God: *allah*. There are numerous other interesting examples of grammaticalization. In the Indo-European languages which developed the categories of definite and indefinite articles, the former category usually derives from demonstrative pronouns, whereas the latter one from the numeral *one*. For example, the Spanish *el* (sg.m) and

[2] https://corpus.quran.com [Accessed: 10 II 2021].

la (sg.f.), the Italian *il, lo* (sg.m) and *la* (sg.f.), and the French *le* (sg.m) and *la* (sg.f.) definite articles derive from various forms of the Latin demonstrative pronoun *ille* (sg.m), *illa* (sg.f), *illud* (sg.n). Similarly, in German the definite articles *der* (sg.m), *die* (sg.f), *das* (sg.n) derive from and have exactly the same form as the demonstrative pronouns *der* (sg.m), *die* (sg.f), *das* (sg.n). As far as the indefinite article is concerned, the Spanish *un* (sg.m), *una* (sg.f) and the Portuguese *um* (sg.m), *uma* (sg.f) derive from the Latin numeral ***ūnus*** (sg.m), *ūna* (sg.f), *ūnum* (sg.n). This observation also refers to other Romance languages. Similarly in English, the indefinite article *a*, *an*, derives from Old English *ān* 'one'; therefore *a* is a reduced form of the original *an*.

In short, it can be said that whereas the definite article is a more abstract, semantically weaker, and often phonetically reduced version of the demonstrative pronoun from which it derives, whereas the indefinite article is a more abstract, semantically weaker, and often phonetically reduced version of the numeral *one* from which it derives. Moreover, an interesting example of grammaticalization can also be found in the creole language called Tok Pisin, one of the official languages of Papua New Guinea, in which the English word *stop*, apart from having the original meaning, now also functions as an auxiliary verb corresponding to the English 'to be', as illustrated in: *yustapwanpelatisa* 'you are a teacher', *yustapwok* 'you are working', etc.

We would like to finish this article with the following general reflection. Whereas consciously language becomes more transparent, iconic, logical and thus simpler, subconsciously it tends to become more abstract, less transparent, illogical and thus more difficult. It is due to the fact that linguistic consciousness is increased in anomalous or even extreme situations where a language needs to be constructed for survival or necessary communication, like for example in the situation of intense language contacts in which usually pidgins and later on creoles appear. However, linguistic consciousness decreases when the language is already well shaped, well acquired and stable, and there is no intense language contact – this observation refers to native users of many contemporary languages, like Polish, Mandarin Chinese, Indonesian, etc. In such a situation there is no need for constructing the language like in the previous case as the language that exists is mature enough to enable advanced and spontaneous communication. In such communication certain linguistic items lose their semantic force due to intense usage and are pushed towards the periphery of abstractness and even disappear altogether, which brings the need to substitute them by new elements. Therefore, languages

experience partial or complete death. However, language death is something natural and does not necessarily mean a great tragedy for the human species, since their intelligence, imagination, creativity, and communication needs will always produce a less or more advanced form of language, depending on the needs – in so doing, languages will again undergo universal processes, some of which have been touched upon above.

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Refleksje nad wybranymi uniwersalnymi procesami prowadzącymi do zmian w językach świata

Zmiana jest naturalnym procesem doświadczanym praktycznie przez wszystko, co istnieje w fizycznym świecie. Zatem spostrzeżenie to dotyczy również wszystkich języków, które bez wyjątku nieustannie podlegają uniwersalnym procesom zmian, często prowadzących do różnego rodzaju nieregularności. Niektórymi z tych procesów są umlaut (przegłos), harmonia samogłoskowa, lenicja i gramatykalizacja. Jeśli chodzi o ten pierwszy, nazywany również mutacją samogłoskową, występuje on zwłaszcza w językach germańskich, takich jak: angielski, szwedzki i niemiecki. Odwrotnym procesem jest harmonia samogłoskowa, którą można znaleźć w języku fińskim, tureckim czy suahili. Jeśli chodzi o lenicję, nazywaną również osłabieniem, spotkać możemy ją chociażby w polskim, niemieckim i irlandzkim. Wydaje się, że takim najpopularniejszym procesem zmiany językowej jest gramatykalizacja, prowadząca do rozwoju gramatyki, bowiem dotyczy ona w zasadzie wszystkich języków naturalnych, w tym bałkańskich. W niniejszym artykule omówieniu podlegają wybrane aspekty następujących języków: angielskiego, niemieckiego, szwedzkiego, łaciny, hiszpańskiego, francuskiego, arabskiego, polskiego, serbskiego, macedońskiego, rumuńskiego, greckiego, fińskiego i tok pisin.

Keywords: *language change, umlaut, vowel harmony, lenition, grammaticalization*
Słowa kluczowe: *zmiany językowe, umlaut (przegłos), harmonia samogłoskowa, lenicja, gramatykalizacja*