

On the growth of variants: sociolinguistic typology and the development of allomorphy and allophony

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Kusters (2003:21) tells us that the transparency principle is a demand “that the relation between form and meaning is as transparent as possible”. The highest level of transparency or analyticity is when “every single meaning is expressed in a separate form”. Kusters then cites the contact-induced loss of allomorphy in Arabic as an obvious example of simplification. Correspondingly, growth in allomorphy will represent a clear case of loss of morphological transparency, and thus an increase in complexity. Braunmüller (1985) has argued that morphological opacity is a typical characteristic of “small languages”, such as Faroese. It would seem to make sense that if contact produces simplification, then lack of contact, as in the case of Faroese, should produce complexification. But is this actually so, and if so, why?

Braunmüller, Kurt. 1985. “Morphologische Undurchsichtigkeit – ein Charakteristikum kleiner Sprachen”. *Kopenhagener Beiträge zur germanistischen Linguistik* 22. 48–68.

Kusters, Wouter. 2003. *Linguistic complexity: The influence of social change on verbal inflection*. Leiden: Leiden University.