

The social matrix of complexification

Peter Trudgill

Fribourg University

Hickey entirely correctly says that “When considering complexity across languages a major issue is determining what the limits of complexity are, both upwards – how complex can a language be – and downwards – how simple can a language be. Examining cross sections of languages shows that there are no pre-set limits.” This paper proposes that, insofar as these are empirical issues, historical sociolinguistic typology gives us some indications as to where to look for help in solving this problem; and to what extent it might be possible to establish where any pre-set limits might lie.