

CHAPTER SEVEN

A VARIATIONIST SOLUTION TO APPARENT COPYING  
ACROSS RELATED LANGUAGES

Brian D. Joseph

A solution is proposed here for the problem raised by the occurrence of similar grammatical developments in two related languages where appealing to common inheritance is not possible. That is, it can happen that related languages undergo similar changes at widely separated stages of their development, so that the chronology precludes standard methods of historical reconstruction from attributing the similarity to shared inheritance from their common proto-language. It is argued here that in such cases, it may well be that there was variation in the proto-language and that each language inherited that variability; if the same variant then surfaces as the prevailing form in each language after a substantial period of time, the effect of seemingly parallel grammatical development can be accounted for. The power of this proposal, which constitutes a reconsideration of the familiar Sapirian notion of 'drift', is demonstrated here against facts from the development of English and German from Proto-West-Germanic and of Sanskrit and Avestan from Proto-Indo-Iranian.

1 INTRODUCTION

Linguists interested in working out the history or prehistory of just about any language group are routinely confronted with similarities across different languages that seem to demand some sort of answer as to why they occur.<sup>1</sup> In principle several solutions are possible in such situations:

- i. the similarities could be the result of inheritance, deriving from a common source in a genealogical<sup>2</sup> sense

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank the editors as well as my colleague Victor Friedman for their very helpful comments that improved this paper considerably.

<sup>2</sup> I actually prefer the term *genetic* here, understood in the original sense of the Greek source, *genetikos*, meaning 'pertaining to origins', but owing to the possibility of confusion

- ii. the similarities could be due to contact between speakers that led to subsequent influence of one language on the other or even to material being transferred between them (what is often perhaps erroneously called “borrowing”, where “copying” or even just “transfer” might be a better characterization)
- iii. the similarities could be due to what might be called “universality” in that they involve similar reactions on the part of speakers to similar stimuli, thus drawing on what is universal about language and the way humans use language to confront the world
- iv. the similarities could be simply a matter of chance, that is coincidence, and thus do not involve any connected causality whatsoever

There are some possible embellishments on these solutions that need to be considered as well. For instance, in the case that is generally referred to as involving independent but parallel innovations, one finds the same feature, whether a sound change or a grammatical feature or construction, arising in two different but related languages. It is possible to think of this situation as a combination of the universal with simple chance, the universal referring to the ability of languages to move in a particular direction and chance being invoked simply to account for why that particular ability was found in a given language at a given time. A further embellishment is presented in section 4 below, though some additional considerations are needed to set the stage for that.

In a real sense, the latter two possibilities above, (iii) and (iv), reveal aspects of the nature of language itself and of the human condition, in that they draw either on purely internal resources in a given language that are governed by universals of linguistic structure (so as to give rise to features that can turn out to be randomly similar though unrelated) or depend on universal aspects of the interaction through language that humans have with their world. Onomatopoeia, as in (1), and nursery forms, as in (2), are typically cited instances of (iii):

- (1) a. Greek [ɣav] / Hebrew [hav] / English [wʊf] / Finnish [vuf] ‘noise made by a dog’
- b. Turkish [vak] / English [kwæk] / Tagalog [kwak kwak] ‘noise made by a duck’

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due to the biological sense of *genetic* that is probably more current now, the term *genealogical* serves as a suitable substitute.

- c. English [pap] / Lithuanian [pokʃt] / Arabic [buʃ] 'noise made by a balloon bursting'
- (2) a. Turkish [baba] / English [papa] / Chinese [baba] 'father; daddy'
- b. Greek [mana] / English [mama] / Tamil [amma] / Korean [amma] 'mother, mommy'

Similarities among languages in the imitation of naturally occurring sounds reveal something about how humans perceive such sounds and how they use their linguistic resources to mimic them, while similarities in nursery terms reveal something about how adults perceive the linguistic abilities of infants. In each case, speakers are reacting in a similar fashion to stimuli that are similar across cultures. Analogously, the chance element in similarities, (iv) above, is connected to the nature of language in that it derives from the fact that there are typically only a relatively small number of distinctive sounds in a given language, on the order of roughly 30–80 in the usual case,<sup>3</sup> and only so many ways that such a number of sounds can be combined, as well as a similar range of meanings that the sound combinations are attached to, so that, when multiplied across the thousands of languages that exist, it is not surprising that some chance similarities should emerge. Thus we ascribe to chance various facts such as those in (3):

- (3) a. Albanian *unë* (pronounced [un] in most dialects) and Fongbe (West Africa) *un* both mean 'I'
- b. in both Manambu (a New Guinea language of the Ndu family) and in Sanskrit, *kur-* means 'make, do' (cf., e.g., Sanskrit *kur-mas* 'we do')
- c. various languages of the Karnic subgroup (Australian languages of the Pama-Nyungan family) have a form *mara* meaning 'hand', similar to Istro-Romanian (a Romance language of the Istrian peninsula) *mără* 'hand'
- d. in Modern Greek and in the Bantu language Etsako, *ʒa* is the marker for future tense.

<sup>3</sup> And in any case, regardless of the analysis, the attested maximum has never surpassed 200; Maddieson (2011), for instance, gives 122 as the highest count for an attested consonant inventory, and then vowels must be added in as well of course.

Facts as in (1)–(3) do offer the possibility for historical inferences in a restricted way in that they allow for speculation on the source of particular forms in a language, or they offer a basis for ruling out some possible sources or connections; but inasmuch as onomatopoetic and nursery forms as in (1) and (2) could be created anew in any given generation at any given stage of a language, their value for understanding linguistic history is very limited.

However, the first two solutions given above, (i) and (ii), depend crucially on history, while (iii) and (iv) do not. That is, by contrast, (i) and (ii) are of particular interest to diachronicians as they point the way to historical developments that are tied to the particular histories of individual languages and groups of speakers; they reveal something about language history—and, potentially, human history—in ways that facts ascribable to (iii) and (iv) do not. In the case of (i), for instance, we are led to the determination of facts about the proto-language involved and about the changes that took place from that proto-language to the attested languages in question that show the relevant similarity. In the case of (ii), we are led to an understanding of the historic or prehistoric contacts between groups of people. In either case, real (pre)historic events are in evidence, whether the event of a group splitting off from a proto-speech-community or the event of different speech communities interacting.

Thus similarities in languages are generally the starting point for historical investigations. They catch the eye of the linguist (and, in some cases, the non-linguist as well). To be perfectly accurate, in the case of inheritances from a proto-language, what we deal with are actually correspondences, which may or may not involve similarity; the famous case of Armenian *erk-* (phonetically [jɛrk]) corresponding to Sanskrit and Greek *dw* (e.g. in the words for ‘two’, Armenian *erku* = Sanskrit *dvā* = Greek δῦω- (as in δῦω-δεκα ‘twelve’)), along with others like Albanian *d* corresponding to Armenian *kh* and English *sw* (e.g. in the words for ‘sweat’, Albanian *dirtsë* = Armenian *khirtn* = English *sweat*), is ample indication that corresponding elements need not be very similar at all.<sup>4</sup> Similarities are more relevant in cases of contact-induced change, or perhaps, more accurately stated, more indicative of contact. Nonetheless, similarities attract atten-

<sup>4</sup> In fact, the more separated two related languages are in time, the more different—and thus distinguished from more recent copies—true cognates often are, given that there simply has been more time for developments leading to divergence to happen (cf. Wakhi vis-à-vis other Indo-Iranian).

tion readily and thus are always a reasonable starting point for historical investigation.

When the similarities involve grammatical material, instead of lexical items or phonological units, the same issues are present, and the same possible solutions are available: one needs to decide whether the grammatical patterns have arisen independently through universal processes, or instead are inherited, are borrowed, or are mere chance occurrences. When we are dealing with languages that are known to be related, the decision can be very difficult.

Although the currently popular notion of “contact-induced grammaticalization”, as developed by Heine & Kuteva (2003; 2005),<sup>5</sup> might appear to give a solution to the existence of parallel grammatical patterns across related languages, it can be argued that in fact it does not do so. That is, even if one works with a model in which grammaticalization processes can spread across languages, in the event of a parallel found in related languages, one still has to look for a way to distinguish between the possibility of parallel grammaticalizations and the inheritance of certain grammatical patterns. Thus, the problem of differentiating parallel but (seemingly) independent developments in a set of related languages from true inheritances or real borrowings remains unsolved by such an approach.

## 2 THE BIGGER PICTURE: COPYING VS. COGNACY

The issues discussed in the previous section pertain to a larger issue which can be summed up in the opposition of *copying* versus *cognacy*, that is whether the grammatical similarities under examination reflect copying across languages, i.e. are due to language contact (solution (ii) above), or reflect cognate formations that are inherited from a common source (solution (i) above). This distinction bears on some further key issues in historical linguistics.

<sup>5</sup> I personally find this notion to be somewhat suspect; see Joseph (2011; 2013) for details and discussion. Briefly, though, while I recognize that grammatical patterns can spread across languages, it is not clear to me that there is any advantage to talking about such spread in terms of “contact-induced grammaticalization” as opposed to more traditional notions such as calquing. Note further that the traditional characterization of parallel but independent developments (emphasis here on the neutral term “developments” and leaving aside the issue of “independent” or not) is preferable, in my view, to talking in terms of specifically grammaticalization processes that are parallel, since there are lots of interesting parallel developments that do not involve grammar in the strict sense, e.g. those involving sound changes.

First, on the one hand, it pertains to the difference, recognized in just about every attempt to understand language change, between contact-induced language change and internally-motivated change. This key distinction is made, for instance, in Andersen (1973), under the rubric of adaptive change vs. evolutive change. As crucial as this distinction seems to be, one might wonder whether, once we recognize that change ultimately involves both an original point of innovation and the subsequent spread of that innovation, the only real difference between contact-induced change and internally-motivated change lies in the source of the original innovation: system-internal vs. system-external. In other words, if what is crucial for that which might be thought of as “real change” is the spread through some significant subset of a speech community of some new feature (whether a word, a turn of phrase, a pronunciation, a grammatical construction, or something else), then the usual terms we use for these two types of motivations for change, namely internal and external, differ only in where the original innovation comes from; the spread of that innovation through a speech community and its ultimate generalization form an essential element in either case.

There are linguists who say that “real change” necessarily involves spread, and that an innovation that goes nowhere does not change anything. This is the view most usually associated with the work of William Labov, as epitomized in Labov (1994; 2001; 2010). Yet, there are others who say that the innovation alone is the only linguistically relevant aspect in change, with spread/diffusion being a sociological phenomenon. That view can be seen in Hale (2007). There seems to be some justification for both points of view, and it is certainly the case that one cannot have spread without some feature to spread, while at the same time, there must be dozens of innovations every day in the mouths of all speakers that leave no lasting results.<sup>6</sup> Without wanting, or even needing, to take sides here, it is enough to signal that there may be less of a difference between internal and external change—and thus perhaps between copying and cognacy—than meets the eye.

<sup>6</sup> I say this based on the fact that the repetition of what is ostensibly the same word throughout the course of a day will yield small fluctuations in the word's acoustic form at each utterance, for instance, greater or lesser degree of aspiration on a word-initial stop in English; all of those fluctuations can be thought of as innovations that go nowhere, that do not gain any “traction” (in the usual case) as far as spread through even a small part of a speech community is concerned. See Croft (2000) for discussion of this point, involving “innovation” and “propagation”, in his terms.

Second, on the other hand, the copying vs. cognacy issue bears on matters of genetic relatedness since in traditional historical linguistic terms, only cognacy is relevant for genetic (genealogical) relationships; copying involves a process that, being external to the system, in principle might never occur whereas cognacy and internal developments are always there. It is thus conceivable that there could be a language so isolated that it has no contact with any other language, but it is inconceivable that there could be a language without internal pressures of some sort affecting speakers and affecting the grammar; all languages have internal resources as part of what makes them a language, but external pressures and resources are in principle due to the accidents of history. Of course, in actuality, there probably are no languages that are untouched by contact with other languages, and even within isolated speech communities there can be what amount to dialectal differences so that dialect contact becomes the issue. But theoretically speaking, the system-internal side of things cannot be avoided while the system-external pressures need not ever come into play.

Moreover, when one recognizes the diffusionary aspect to the notion of change (“real change” for some), one then has to say that in a sense all change involves contact, inasmuch as contact is essential for diffusion. Thus, even in instances where we can recognize a clear “Stammbaum”-like innovation that gives an unmistakable branching or fragmenting of a speech community into two (or more) varieties,<sup>7</sup> the branching or fragmenting has to be achieved by speech-community-internal contact-induced spread of that innovation. In that sense, even what we would traditionally call “cognate” formations involve “copying”.<sup>8</sup>

### 3 DEALING WITH SIMILAR DEVELOPMENTS IN RELATED LANGUAGES

We can now return to the leading questions here, namely how it is that we can find similar developments in related languages, and what we are to make of such situations. In such cases, it may well be that we simply recognize that there are universal—or at least cross-linguistically common—

<sup>7</sup> I do believe that such “events” happen and have to be recognized in our historical linguistic cosmology, even if it is the case that there are many historical events, such as those involving contact, that do not fit into this schema.

<sup>8</sup> See also Enfield (2005), who makes this same point, rather effectively, and offers a good overview of the relevant literature.

directions of grammatical development and that in a situation involving similarities, it is likely to be the case that language universals (or universal tendencies) give the result of parallel developments. The fact that the languages are related would be of no consequence, and the result is really that the parallelism is due to chance, since languages do not have to follow even universally well attested paths of development.

Such situations do occur, as can be seen quite readily with recurring sound changes in related languages, where what is known about the phonetics of sound change gives some basis for thinking that changes could occur independently in different languages without requiring that the changes be linked somehow. For instance, post-Classical Greek underwent spirantization of voiced stops and so did Ibero-Romance, but under most interpretations, these developments presumably do not have—or need not have—anything to do with one another historically; rather, they can simply be understood as independent but interestingly parallel developments caused by the phonetics of voiced stops (e.g. that maintaining voicing is aerodynamically difficult so that releasing the stop midway through the articulation, thereby creating a fricative, is a “solution” to the aerodynamic problem).

And when something of this sort is observed in totally unrelated languages, there can be no question of historical unrelatedness. For instance, voicing of intervocalic [ t ] to [ d ] is found in the passage from Vulgar Latin to Spanish (as in *potere* > *poder*) and also in the passage from Proto-Algonquian to Ojibwa, yet surely no one would want to connect these two developments except to remark on the “phonetic naturalness” of intervocalic voicing.

What is unsatisfying about such scenarios when applied to grammatical change in related languages, however, is the inkling that one is missing something, especially since in the case of grammatical change there is no physiologically rooted notion of “naturalness” that one can fall back on, as one can with “articulatory naturalness” and its role in sound changes. Thus even if a particular grammatical development is well-instantiated in a number of unrelated languages to the point that its occurrence in any one language is perhaps not remarkable, a solid physical basis for that lack of remarkability is still missing. And while a cognitive basis might be sought, to be sure, it could hardly be the case that such a cognitive basis would necessarily be active in any given language; that is, the relevant cognitive activity might or might not be in play for a given speaker at a given time—it is available, to be sure, but not unavoidable—whereas the physicality of articulation, in the case of sound change, cannot be over-



come or ignored by a speaker.<sup>9</sup> This means that any parallelism shown by grammatical developments in related languages, if not a matter of inheritance or borrowing, must, under present assumptions, be considered to be merely accidental. This is so even if the development is one that is frequently encountered in a wide range of languages. All in all, such outcomes are not very satisfying.

To account for cases like this, Sapir (1921, 126–127) suggested the notion of “drift”, in a famous and now-classic passage that is worth quoting in full, despite its length:

We must return to the conception of “drift” in language. If the historical changes that take place in a language, if the vast accumulation of minute modifications which in time results in the complete remodeling of the language, are not in essence identical with the individual variations that we note on every hand about us, if these variations are born only to die without a trace, while the equally minute, or even minuter, changes that make up the drift are forever imprinted on the history of the language, are we not imputing to this history a certain mystical quality? Are we not giving language a power to change of its own accord over and above the involuntary tendency of individuals to vary the norm? And if this drift of language is not merely the familiar set of individual variations seen in vertical perspective, that is historically, instead of horizontally, that is in daily experience, what is it? Language exists only in so far as it is actually used—spoken and heard, written and read. What significant changes take place in it must exist, to begin with, as individual variations. This is perfectly true, and yet it by no means follows that the general drift of language can be understood from an exhaustive descriptive study of these variations alone. They themselves are random phenomena, like the waves of the sea, moving backward and forward in purposeless flux. The linguistic drift has direction. In other words, only those individual variations embody it or carry it which move in a certain direction, just as only certain wave movements in the bay outline the tide. The drift of a language is constituted by the unconscious selection on the part of its speakers of those individual variations that are cumulative in some special direction. This direction may be inferred, in the main, from the past history of the language. In the long run any new feature of the drift becomes part and parcel of the common, accepted speech, but for a long time it may exist as a mere tendency in the speech of a few, perhaps of a despised few. As we look about us and observe current usage, it is not likely to occur to us that our language has a “slope,” that the changes of the next few centuries are in a sense prefigured in certain obscure tendencies of the present and that

<sup>9</sup> It is true that our understanding of the human brain lags far behind our understanding of the parts of the human body that produce the sounds upon which language is based, but it seems that cognitive connections are not deterministic in the way that the actions of the physical organs of articulation are.

these changes, when consummated, will be seen to be but continuations of changes that have been already effected. We feel rather that our language is practically a fixed system and that what slight changes are destined to take place in it are as likely to move in one direction as another. The feeling is fallacious. Our very uncertainty as to the impending details of change makes the eventual consistency of their direction all the more impressive.

Especially important in this is the statement:

the changes of the next few centuries are in a sense prefigured in certain obscure tendencies of the present and that these changes, when consummated, will be seen to be but continuations of changes that have been already effected.

Sapir's invocation of "continuations of changes that have been already effected" at first seems like asking time to curve back on itself, giving his notion of "drift" an almost mystical feel. But Sapir's insight is clear when he mentions "individual variations . . . which move in a certain direction" and notes that "the drift of a language is constituted by the unconscious selection on the part of its speakers of those individual variations that are cumulative in some special direction". The recognition of the importance of variation provides a way of answering the copying vs. cognacy question while at the same time giving some greater empirical substance to Sapir's seeming mysticism in describing drift.

In particular, if one looks to variation in the proto-language for the languages involved as a source of parallel developments, as suggested in Joseph (2006), then parallel developments can reflect inheritances into each language of variants that existed in the proto-language. Thus one has cognacy, to be sure, either in actual forms that are used grammatically or at the more abstract level of patterns or categories with different variants as their realization. However, the variants, if they make their way into each language, can give the impression of copies. Moreover, the timing for the "activation", that is to say the emergence, of a variant within a language is independent of its activation/emergence in another, so that one sees what amount to parallel but independent developments that are nonetheless inherited.

To develop this notion a bit more, the basic idea is that, as seen above in section 1, there are situations where developments in related languages seem to be similar but at the same time are separated chronologically in such a way as to seemingly preclude a connection between them. For instance, late in both the German branch and the English branch of West Germanic, a change occurs of #hR- > R-, loss of initial [h] before a reso-

nant, as in OE *hlūd* > NE *loud*, OHG *hlūt* > NHG *Laut*, and it is known further, based on the work of Toon (1991), that the loss of #h- in that context was variable in Old English. If that variability is projected back to Proto-West-Germanic, and if it is recognized that the variability might be socially suppressed in such a way as to keep it out of textual traditions, e.g., on the Old High German side, but that it could also emerge—or better, re-emerge—at a later stage, then we have a natural account for why ostensibly the same change could be found late in English and late in German.

Several other such cases are offered in Joseph (2006), but a novel one that involves grammar can be cited here. It is admittedly somewhat speculative but hinges on the same sort of evidence as the West Germanic #hR- one, and thus it has a similar degree of plausibility.

In Indo-Iranian one finds that late in both the Iranian and the Indic traditions, i.e. in Younger Avestan (but not the older Gathic Avestan) and in Classical/Epic Sanskrit (but not the older Vedic Sanskrit), the genitive case usurps some of the functions of the dative case, and the dative is used less and less. In particular one finds genitives used in the marking of indirect objects. One needs to ask if these developments are connected; the usual assumptions about chronology would require a negative answer, inasmuch as they each occur late within their respective traditions. Moreover, this may be just a “natural” kind of change, since a seemingly similar development occurs in post-Classical Greek, where genitive case forms begin to assume traditional functions of the datives, especially for the marking of indirect objects, in the Hellenistic period. The Greek situation, however, seems to be tied to an entirely different sort of case-system from the Indo-Iranian one, in particular one in which dative served a wide variety of functions (in Classical Greek) including use as a locative and as the object of various prepositions, functions that were not found in Indo-Iranian and which were given up in Greek as part of a general retreat of the dative. And this in turn is perhaps also to be connected to the expansion of Greek in the Hellenistic period (so Browning 1969, 42).

To focus just on Indic and Iranian, then, the question nonetheless is how the same development with the dative and genitive cases can be found in later stages within each branch but not in the oldest stages. Chronology of this sort in most formulations would require one to say that they were parallel developments but entirely independent of one another. This may well be what one has to appeal to; however, especially in the face of the presence of numerous other parallels discussed below that offer the same

sort of parallelism with the same sort of chronology, it is an unsatisfying result. It would mean that this particular similarity is totally accidental, even though the languages are so closely related to one another and the developments appear to be rather similar. Therefore, we have here the sort of situation where appealing to proto-language variation may well be explanatory.

In other words, if Proto-Indo-Iranian showed variable use of genitive and dative in similar functions, then it could be posited that this variation persisted into each branch, i.e. that it was inherited from the proto-language into Indic and into Iranian, but happens to be absent from the available record in the earliest layers, perhaps due to a social stigmatization associated with this (presumably innovative) usage. It can be posited that it was “submerged” in the earliest layers but “bubbled up” to the surface in later Indic and later Iranian, perhaps losing any stigmatization as other changes moved the language away from its oldest, canonical form from an earlier period.<sup>10</sup>

A crucial piece of evidence that gives us reason to believe that such variation is not just speculation for the proto-language is one context where in even the oldest layers of Indic and of Iranian one finds that the dative and genitive are interchangeable, namely in the enclitic forms of the 1/2 personal pronouns, where each of the forms listed in (4) stand in for dative and for genitive uses (e.g. Skt. *me* means both ‘for me’ and ‘of me; my’):

|     |     |      |       |  |      |       |
|-----|-----|------|-------|--|------|-------|
| (4) |     | Skt. | Aves. |  | Skt. | Aves. |
|     | 1SG | me   | mē    |  | 1PL  | nas   |
|     | 2SG | te   | tē    |  | 2PL  | vas   |
|     |     |      |       |  |      | nā    |
|     |     |      |       |  |      | vā    |

This formal merger is likely to be an Indo-Iranian innovation, inasmuch as Greek shows a Dative/Genitive distinction in weak (enclitic) forms, e.g. 1/2SG *moi / soi* (Dat.)—*meu / seu* (Gen.); note that *\*moi/t(w)oi* as Dative would give the Sanskrit and Avestan singular forms (and Greek), so that here the interchange is due to dative taking on functions of the genitive. Thus, in Proto-Indo-Iranian, as the variationist account would have it, there was a context in which genitive and dative did show an overlap and

<sup>10</sup> As a parallel, for which I thank my colleague Victor Friedman, one can note the prescriptively stigmatized construction *between you and I*, with a non-objective case form after a preposition, which is so widespread now in everyday usage in American English as to essentially be the norm.

thus essentially varied with one another; another way of saying this is that one case was encroaching on the other, at least as far as the pronouns were concerned. Such “encroachment” is exactly what variable employment of one case or the other is all about. Complete encroachment, that is the generalization of one case completely over the other, came later in each branch of Indo-Iranian, long suppressed in writing but subsequently emerging.

Such accounts are always somewhat speculative, since proto-languages are not attested but rather are only themselves constructs, involving educated “guesswork” on the part of the linguist. But in this case, the account is bolstered by other late-ish parallels between Younger Avestan and Classical Sanskrit that would be completely accidental without some sort of proto-language variation account. These include massive parallels in sandhi, reflecting the forms that word-final segments take in connected speech, such as *-o* from *\*-as#* in Sanskrit (but with an indication that *-e* might be the oldest treatment in Indic) and *-ō* in (especially) Younger Avestan, also from *\*-as#* (but with an indication of a competing older treatment, *-ē* in this case). There is also variable vowel length (especially with high vowels) in all stages of Avestan and sporadically throughout Sanskrit, as well as the morphological fluctuation in 1SG *-ā* / *-āmi* in Vedic and Gathic Avestan, leveled out in both Younger Avestan and Classical Sanskrit with the variant *-āmi* being generalized in each case.

When taken together, therefore, a picture emerges of a large number of linguistic features that occur in both Indic and in Iranian late in their respective traditions, to the point that a more realistic reconstruction should not ignore them but rather should work from the reality of related and cognate features and posit them as variably present for the proto-language: genitive/dative merger can thus be one such feature.

#### 4 CONCLUSION

The answer offered here to the cognacy vs. copying puzzle in general, but especially with regard to seemingly parallel grammatical patterns, is thus that perhaps in such cases, one should entertain the possibility that there was proto-language variation between a form *X* and a variant *X'*,<sup>11</sup> where one is the fuller form and the other the apparently “grammaticalized”

<sup>11</sup> Or between a pattern *X* and a variant competing pattern *X'* that both respond to the same grammatical function or realize the same grammatical category.

form, and posit further that each language inherited that variation and that the “grammaticalized” form became the norm after being sociolinguistically suppressed. Admittedly this is speculative, but it frames the question in a different way and can therefore spur researchers to seek relevant evidence for such variation and sociolinguistic suppression. In general, then, proto-language variation should be recognized as a way of making reconstructed proto-languages more realistic, given that variability is a feature of all languages, and, when confronting difficult cases of similarity across languages, it should be kept in mind as a tool within our diachronician’s “bag of tricks”, something to be called upon and used as the situation calls for it.

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PART TWO  
CASE STUDIES  
AMERICA

