

# Innovation and propagation in the Theory of Utterance Selection

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The methods for investigating evolving systems are increasingly being recognised as applicable to the field of language change (e.g. Lass 1997; Croft 2000; Ritt 2004; Blevins 2004). There are several different ways of conceptualising language change in evolutionary terms. The approach that serves as the basis of the present discussion is Croft's (2000) Theory of Utterance Selection, according to which the basic units of selection, or the replicators in language change are utterances, which thus constitute the 'genotype of language', while the mental grammar plays a role parallel to that of phenotype in biological evolution (cf. Tamariz 2010).

One of the central tenets of Croft's theory is the separation of innovation and propagation, that is, the introduction of novel variants and their spread within the pool of utterances. The main claim in this presentation is that this distinction is unwarranted: what seems to be an innovation at a certain level of analysis (e.g. the introduction of a new variant such as [əv'bæmər] for *Obama*) is propagation at other levels (e.g. at the level of phonotactics, where both ə# and ɚ# already exist). An important consequence of this is that the mental grammar now appears at two points within linguistic evolution: it is both a source of new variants and a selection pressure acting on existing variants.

## References

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