

Number Names in Two Simplified Languages

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Contemporary linguistics is very much preoccupied with the question of simplification and simplicity. This preoccupation shows itself in formal linguistics, where simplicity is often said to be a reason for choosing one of two alternative grammatical formulations (CHOMSKY 1957: 53 ff.), in historical linguistics, where many changes in languages are seen as the results of simplification (KING 1969: 64 ff.), and in sociolinguistics, where certain varieties of language, such as baby-talk and the language used to speak to foreigners are regarded as simplified variants of fuller languages (FERGUSON 1971). In addition, the idea of simplicity is crucial to the study of pidginized languages, whose whole identity as a group relies on the notion that they are reduced or simplified with respect to the languages from which they derive their vocabulary (cf. HALL 1966: 25).

In spite of this contemporary preoccupation with simplicity and simplification in language, we have no clear definition of simplicity itself, nor have we, in general, given two linguistic systems, any criterion for deciding which is the simpler. The lack of any such criterion or definition makes it very difficult to discuss simplification with regard to any empirical situation, or to recognize simplified structures.

How can this problem be resolved? Clearly not by *a priori* or *ex cathedra* declarations, for any scholar is free to make these without limit, and no consensus is likely to result from any number of such declarations. A better approach is the empirical one. If we can investigate some clear cases of simplification which, even in the absence of an agreed-upon definition of simplicity, are recognized to be the kinds of examples that a theory of simplicity should be able to explain, and elucidate the special characteristics of each case, we may be able to arrive at general definitions which may be applied to new cases.

The procedure may seem to be circular in the sense that it begins with a judgement about what is simple in order to arrive at a definition of simplicity. This is not quite true. We begin with an intuitive concept of simplicity derived from ordinary language, and attempt to define a non-ambiguous criterion