

Differential place-name marking: An explanation in terms of predictability and coding efficiency

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Place names show a universal tendency to have zero (or short) markers of locative and allative relations. This was noted, e.g., by Creissels & Mounole (2011), but the implicational universal in (1) is not widely known yet.

- (1) If a language has asymmetric differential coding of locative/allative relations for place names, then place names are coded with a shorter form or by zero.

For example, in Mehweb (Dagestanian), the allative case is identical to the nominative case with native place names (e.g. Meḥwe 'Megeb (a settlement)', Meḥwe 'to Megeb', but Maskaw 'Moscow', Maskaw-ize 'to Moscow') (Daniel et al. 2019). Stolz et al. (2017) cite examples like (2) from Mokilese (Oceanic):

- (2) *Ngoah* *prin* *inla* *Kolonia lakapw*.
1SG want go Kolonia tomorrow
'I'll go to Kolonia tomorrow.'

Zero coding of place with toponyms is also common in creole and pidgin languages, as reported by Michaelis et al. (2013), for example in Mauritian Creole in *Mo pe al Vakwa* [1SG PROG go Vacoas] 'I am going to Vacoas.'

In the talk we argue that just like differential object marking (and many other argument coding splits, cf. Haspelmath 2019), differential place marking can be explained in terms of predictability and coding efficiency. The zero or short locative marking corresponds to the greater frequency of locative occurrences of place names, and it is efficient to use short coding when the locative meaning is predictable. We provide corpus evidence for the frequency claim from a number of languages, and we discuss a variety of different diachronic pathways through which differential place-name marking may arise, especially based on data from pidgin and creole languages.

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