George Walkden (University of Konstanz), website: http://walkden.space/index.html
'Sociolinguistic typology reevaluated'

Abstract:

This paper revisits and evaluates the theory of sociolinguistic typology put forward in Trudgill (2011). According to this theory, the degree of linguistic 'complexification' in a language reflects aspects of its social structure. More specifically, Trudgill (2011) identified two major categories of social factors that he claims are linked to cross-linguistic grammatical variation and change: the relative degree of contact versus isolation of language communities, and their relative degree of social stability versus instability. Increased language contact and instability in terms of language transmission, Trudgill suggested, lead to more rapid language change. In particular, he proposed that it leads to a process of grammatical 'simplification'.

In this talk I will focus on what progress has been made in testing the theory since 2011, in three domains: i) what counts as simple and what as complex, ii) what predictions the theory makes outside the domain of morphology (and whether they are correct), and iii) how to understand and specify the population-level predictions of the theory. I will present empirical findings and new developments that have emerged from the project STARFISH (Sociolinguistic Typology And Responsive Features in Syntactic History) and outline how they bear on these questions.