

New perspectives on (morpho)syntactic variation in Germanic and Romance varieties: Combining functional-quantitative with formal-theoretical approaches

Functional(-quantitative) and formal approaches to language have for a long time been regarded as complete opposites in linguistic theorizing with neither of the two approaches considering the other's perspective in their work (e.g. Haspelmath 2000); the binary/dichotomic relationship between the two approaches goes back to the (non-)assumption of a Universal Grammar or rather an innate faculty of speech. While both approaches essentially assume that language is a cognitive object, it is not until recently that the view has emerged that both approaches – functional and formal – are necessary to account for the full range of variation we can observe in language (see e.g. contributions in Adli et al. 2015; also Pierrehumbert 2006; and the ERC-Grant Starfish project which combines sociolinguistics with theoretical linguistics, cf. Walkden/Breitbarth 2019). These so-called hybrid models of language assume that both formal (rule-based) approaches as well as functional (usage-based) approaches are needed to explain the full gradience of variation (see Guy 2014; also Grafmiller et al. 2018). One such model, the variationist sociolinguistic framework, assumes that variation is governed both by abstract rules (e.g. the person hierarchy and subject selection, cf. Bresnan et al. 2001) but also allows for subtle variability in these rules that are learned from one's exposure to linguistic input. A (more) formalist framework is, by the way, quite similar in its assumptions of abstract rules and variability in the output (e.g. narrow syntax and feature selection; the so-called third-factor principles, cf. Chomsky 2005). Both approaches are similar to each other in that they try to explain variation in terms of linguistic and extralinguistic principles. With this, hybrid models follow Bybee (2006: 711) in that they assume that grammar is the “cognitive organization of one's experience with language”, thus allowing for subtle adaptation of the abstractions postulated by formal approaches. While such hybrid models have been proposed for some years now, there is no systematic investigation into the full range of grammatical phenomena. What is more, a large number of studies that assume a hybrid approach investigate variation in English (and varieties thereof) while other Germanic varieties and other languages such as Romance dialects have remained under the radar. A workshop that brings together scholars working on both perspectives, 20 years after “Why can't we talk to each other” (Haspelmath 2000), is thus a timely matter.

Our workshop thus invites linguists who are interested in combining both formal and functional approaches to understand linguistic variation. More specifically, we are interested in papers that investigate (morpho)syntactic variation in (non-standard) Germanic and Romance varieties by combining different linguistic approaches (e.g. from formal/theoretical, functional, quantitative, applied linguistics). Contributions should address one or more of the following questions:

- Do we get different or similar results if we approach a phenomenon from different theoretical perspectives?
- Are functional and formal linguistics still two different coins, or are they more like two sides of a coin? What is “functional-quantitative” and what is “formal/theoretical”? Is this distinction still up to date or do we need another terminology?
- Can we explain linguistic variation using both perspectives and what do we gain from this?

In practice, we invite talks (20 minutes plus 10 minutes for discussion) on (morpho)syntactic variation in Germanic and Romance varieties (e.g. case, word order, negation, pro-drop etc.) that combine the perspective of functional-quantitative linguistics and formal-theoretical linguistics.

An (open access) publication is envisaged of contributions that offer a combined perspective and thus can contribute to developing linguistic assumptions about formal vs functional approaches to language.

Date: Friday, 28th May 2021. Please note that the workshop will take place completely online. Please submit your abstracts (500 words excluding references) by 28th February 2021 via EasyAbs: <http://linguistlist.org/easyabs/HybAppr2LangVar>.

Organizers: Ann-Marie Moser, Melanie Röthlisberger (both University of Zurich) & Thomas Strobel (Goethe University Frankfurt)

References

- Adli, Aria / García García, Marco / Kaufmann, Göz (eds.). 2015. *Variation in Language: System- and Usage-based Approaches*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter.
- Bresnan, Joan / Dingare, Shipra / Manning, Christopher. 2001. Soft constraints mirror hard constraints: Voice and Person in Lummi and English. *Proceedings of the LFG' 01 Conference, University of Hong Kong*. Stanford: CSLI Publications, 13–32.
- Bybee, Joan. 2006. From usage to grammar: The mind's response to repetition. *Language* 82(4), 711–733.
- Chomsky, Noam. 2005. Three factors in language design. *Linguistic Inquiry* 36, 1–22.
- Grafmiller, Jason / Szmrecsanyi, Benedikt / Röthlisberger, Melanie / Heller, Benedikt. 2018. General introduction: A comparative perspective on probabilistic variation in grammar. *Glossa: a journal of general linguistics* 3(1): 94, 1–10. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5334/gjgl.690>.
- Guy, Gregory. 2014. Linking usage and grammar: Generative phonology, exemplar theory, and variable rules. *Lingua* 142(1), 57–65.
- Haspelmath, Martin. 2000. Why can't we talk to each other? A review article of 'Newmeyer, Frederick. 1998. *Language form and language function*. Cambridge: MIT Press.' *Lingua* 110(4), 235–255.
- Pierrehumbert, Janet. 2006. The next toolkit. *Journal of Phonetics* 34, 516–530.
- Walkden, George / Breitbarth, Anne. 2019. Complexity as L2-difficulty: implications for syntactic change. *Theoretical Linguistics* 45(3–4), 183–209.