

WORKSHOP

Diachronic morphology: theoretical, areal, and phylogenetic perspectives

Zurich, January 26-27, 2017

Grammar and lexicon (in the sense of ‘vocabulary’) have both been central to understanding language change. However, their diachronic behavior is often contrasted in at least two respects:

- It has been suggested that, on the whole, grammar (including morphology) changes more slowly than lexicon (e.g. Nichols 1992, 2003, Dunn et al. 2005). It has also been suggested that different types of grammatical structure have different degrees of diachronic stability, though this has so far not led to consensus (see Dediu & Cysouw 2013 for an overview of different approaches)
- In contact linguistics, it has repeatedly been claimed that structure is more resistant to borrowing than vocabulary (see e.g. Moravcsik 1978, Thomason & Kaufman 1988, McMahon & McMahon 2005), while at the same time structure is expected to leave substrate signals after language shift and in situations of convergence.

Morphology, with its close ties to both the lexicon and syntax, can play a key role in arriving at a better understanding of this seemingly contrastive diachronic behavior of lexicon and grammar. Morphology itself seems to display ambiguous diachronic behavior. On the one hand, the distribution of broad morphological types over the globe suggests areal, contact-related diffusion. On the other hand, patterns of flexivity and syncretism often show strong lineage-specific signals.

In order to better understand the dynamics of morphological patterns in time and space, we need (1) to develop more fine-grained approaches to morphological categories and types, in which broad types are broken down into lower-level variables, whose phylogenetic and areal behavior can then be studied individually; and (2) to adopt methods of analysis that are sensitive to genealogical and geographical diversity. Combining the latest insights in morphological theory and comparative-historical linguistics is crucial for adequately addressing one of the key challenges in comparative morphology: distinguishing contact-induced vs universally favored vs random spread of specific morphological patterns within families, or cross-family stability vs. areal spread.

Keynote speakers

Marianne Mithun (UC Santa Barbara)

Andrew Spencer (University of Essex)

Call for papers

With this workshop we want to achieve a rapprochement between comparative-historical morphology and morphological theory, addressing the question of how morphological theory can contribute to comparative-diachronic approaches to morphology and vice versa. We are

especially interested in the following topics (but potential contributors should not feel restricted by them):

- Differential stability of subparts of morphology
- Comparisons between lexicon, syntax, and morphology in terms of rates of change
- The diachronic behavior of lexicon-like morphology and morphology-like syntax
- Fine-grained approaches to the areal and genealogical behavior of morphological types
- The use of modern computational techniques in establishing phylogenetic and/or areal patterns in morphology
- The use of refined geographical methods to map and explain patterns of areal diffusion

Abstracts (max. 1 page) should be uploaded to EasyChair by **1 November 2016**. Notification of acceptance: 20 November 2016

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The organizing committee

Rik van Gijn, Stefan Dedio, Francesco Gardani, Florian Matter, Peter Ranacher, Florian Sommer, Manuel Widmer

The scientific committee

The organizing committee plus Wolfgang Behr, Balthasar Bickel, Mathias Jenny, Michele Loporcaro, Robert Weibel, Paul Widmer, Fernando Zúñiga

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