SLE workshop proposal – CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

https://societaslinguistica.eu/sle2022/

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If you are interested in participating, please send us an abstract before November 15.

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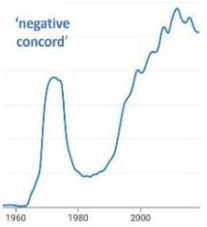
A hundred years of negative concord



Google n-grams

A century ago Jespersen (1922: 352) introduced the notion of 'concord of negatives', nowadays called 'negative concord'. Fifty years later Labov (1972) quickened the interest in negative concord, with a focus on African American Vernacular English. The attention then lapsed, but with an interlude of a quarter century we are now in the heyday of negative concord research. Current work deals with variation, within one language and across languages, mostly synchronic, from a formal, mostly generative angle or a functional-typological one. Catalysts were four doctoral dissertations, viz. Laka (1994), Giannakidou (1997), Kahrel (1996) and Haspelmath (1997). An appreciation of the current state of the art can be gained from de Swart (2010), Larrivée & Ingham (eds.) (2011), Willis, Lucas & Breitbarth (eds.) (2013), Hansen & Visconti (eds.) (2014), van der Auwera & Van Alsenoy (2016), Giannakidou & Zeijlstra (2017), and Breitbarth, Lucas & Willis (2020).

From both the formal and the functional-typological perspectives negative concord is studied in relation to negative polarity, negation and indefiniteness. Simplifying somewhat, the formal perspective has yielded a sophisticated understanding of language-specific distinctions in Eurasian languages, esp. European ones, whereas the typological perspective has made one appreciate that there is a lot of variation in the world at large, but the perspective is necessarily coarse-grained. Both approaches have uncovered the complex interplay of structural and pragmatic factors in the diachronic emergence and in the synchronic distribution of negative concord, highlighting its significance for general models of linguistic variation (for instance, by connecting negative concord to general mechanisms of agreement, by investigating its interaction with word order, by singling out possible motivations behind what has been interpreted as a form-meaning mismatch or as a case of multiple exponence).

Another parallel discovery in the formal and functional-typological research traditions concerns the fact that, besides the existence of some general patterns, which allow one to assign a type to a language as a whole (e.g. 'Double Negation language' or 'Strict Negative Concord language'), one also observes the existence of language-internal variation tied to the individual lexical items. For instance, connective (correlative) negation ('neither….nor') often shows an idiosyncratic behaviour with respect to negative concord (de Swart 2001; Doetjes 2005; van der Auwera, Nomachi & Krasnoukhova 2021), a fact that can have diachronic consequences (Gianollo 2018). With respect to lexically determined structural variation, the tests used to distinguish between negative polarity items and negative concord items have been shown to be language-specific to a certain extent, making it difficult to

establish consensual descriptive tools and terminology. Other facts concerning distribution, such as the asymmetry in frequency between strict and non-strict negative concord languages, and areal tendencies, still await proper treatment.

The SLE workshop is designed to take stock and to set the agendas, with an eye towards increased cross-fertilization. Themes include:

1 / What are the major unsolved questions in the formal approaches? Can the answers profit from the increasing appreciation of world-wide variation?

2 / Is it feasible to work on the typology of negative concord with the increased sophistication that comes from typically formal language-specific accounts?

3 / In both strands of research corpus work is increasingly important, both in synchronic work and in diachronic work – in the latter, corpus work is the key method. How can corpus findings steer the theoretical work?

4 / Despite the early work on Afro-American Vernacular English and the analysis of the differences with Standard English in the seventies, most synchronic work has associated a language with one doculect. In generative research the doculect is often a standard language, and in typological work, it is often the one variety of the one village of the one field worker. Can the research on negative concord overcome these restrictions?

5 / What is the contribution of diachronic research to the theoretical debate? How can incipient negative concord be characterized in structural and pragmatic terms? What is the relationship between the rise / demise of negative concord and Jespersen's Cycle? How to deal with variation and optionality in historical documents?

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