

COMPARATIVE SYNTAX IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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This workshop aims at creating a forum to discuss current comparative studies in a formal perspective, focusing on the nature of morphosyntactic variation in natural languages.

Since the eighties, the theory of Principles and Parameters (Chomsky 1981, Chomsky & Lasnik 1993) has sought to articulate invariant constraints of Universal Grammar and the acquisition of particular languages. In this perspective, comparative syntax has been considered to be a window on the language faculty since it may provide new evidence about its general character. When investigating possible cross-linguistic generalizations and why they can be maintained, the linguist aims to arrive at more concrete hypotheses about the language faculty. Therefore, comparison across languages is an essential part of formal linguistics, and the study of closely or differently related varieties has been very useful to identify the core principles and parameters of Universal Grammar.

Recently, comparative work in this perspective has introduced the concepts of macro- and microparameters (Kayne 2005, Baker 2008, among others). Macroparameters differ from microparameters in that the expression of the former is more salient when comparing languages, leading to a ‘typological’ classification. Microparameters, on the other hand, refer to small-scale differences among grammars, their expression not being always pervasive in the primary linguistic data. As such, Romance languages have been the main responsible for the development of these studies. Additionally, recent theoretical discussions about these issues led by scholars as Roberts (2019), among others, have been centered on the idea that, in order to identify parameters of variation, one must also take into account what has been referred to as “the third factor”, besides holding constant many possible variable properties among the languages being investigated.

Against this background, this workshop is devised as a place for the discussion of current formal work and theorizing on these topics. We will welcome recent papers on comparative studies, not only on Romance but on any language and/or group of languages typologically related or not. As an additional goal, this workshop aims at addressing the discussion on the theoretical relevance of the very concepts of macro-, microparameters and parameter hierarchies. Therefore, case studies as well as discussions on the nature of parameters in the analysis of linguistic variation are topics that can be included in this workshop.

Additionally, innovative ways of analyzing morphosyntactic variation amongst languages by the employment of tools provided by corpora construction, computational linguistics and results from language acquisition studies are also contemplated as prospective papers.

As a result of this meeting, we expect to provide further contribution to the field of comparative studies in a formal perspective, a field that has engaged several linguists and has brought up an enlightening investigation on the linguistic properties of many languages and language families. We hope the meeting will foster a lively debate and bring new insights to the issues aforementioned, given that there are many questions still waiting for an answer.

References:

- Baker, M.** 2008. The microparameter in a microparametric world. In T. Biberauer (ed.) *The limits of syntactic variation*, 351-373. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. **Chomsky, N.** Lectures on government and binding. Dordrecht: Foris. **Chomsky, N. & Lasnik, H.** 1993. *The theory of principles and parameters*. In J. Jacobs et al. (eds.) *Syntax: an international handbook of contemporary research*, vol.1, 506-569. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter. **Kayne, R.** 2005. Some notes on comparative syntax. In G. Cinque & R. Kayne (eds) *The Oxford handbook of comparative syntax*, 3-69. Oxford: Oxford University Press. **Roberts, I.** 2019. *Parameter hierarchies and Universal Grammar*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.