Subordination and language change: new cross-linguistic approaches and perspectives

Deadline for abstract submission: January 15th, 2022 (Third Call for Papers)

A recurrent claim in the literature on language change concerns the conservativeness of subordinate clauses, i.e., the tendency for innovations to arise in main clauses and only later, if at all, extend to embedded contexts (Lightfoot 1982: 154, Bybee et al. 1994: 230–231, Crowley & Bowern 2010: 231). A number of cross-linguistic grammatical asymmetries mapped along different clause types have been accounted for by this view, concerning, for instance, word order in Biblical Hebrew (Givón 1977: 191–234), Chadic (Frajzyngier 1996: 165–173), Germanic (Hock 1991: 330–336) and Niger-Congo (Givón 1979: 259–261). The emergence of innovative morphology in main clauses vs. preservation of obsolete morphology in subordinate clauses in Basque (Aldai 2000: 48), Cairene Arabic (Mitchell 1956: 83–85) and Tokyo Japanese (Matsuda 1993) has been explained in the same terms. Matsuda (1998) and Bybee (2002) provide an extensive overview of the reasons for this contrast between clause types.

There are, however, several issues with the view that subordinate clauses preserve old features in the face of language change. First of all, some scholars argue for the exact contrary, namely that innovative patterns emerge in embedded contexts and only later extend to root clauses; this point has been made in studies on reanalysis (Campbell 1991: 285–299), word order change (Stockwell & Minkova 1991: 399–400) and the loss of null referential pronouns in languages such as Old High German (Axel 2007: 307–314), Middle French (Vance 1997: 294–321, Ledgeway 2021 among others) and Old Russian (Luraghi & Pinelli 2015). Second, other contributions state that language change ensues at equal rates in all contexts affected by the change (Kroch 1989: 206). Third, comparative research on this topic is hampered by the fact that the concepts clause and subordination have, despite their frequent use in the literature, numerous definitions that vary depending on the conception of grammar. As a result, there is a lack of comprehensive cross-linguistic studies on the diachronic behavior of different clause types. This is despite the fact that the increasing availability of grammatical descriptions and access to digital corpora would enable such comparative research.

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The aim of this workshop is to bring together scholars from different theoretical persuasions working on historical linguistics, both in languages with a well-documented history and languages for which less diachronic evidence is available, but which can nonetheless provide valuable data on the basis of comparative analysis. We welcome abstracts dealing with specific languages as well as those which adopt a more general cross-linguistic perspective. The following is a non-exhaustive list of possible topics:

- What evidence is there that specific clause (sub)types are more innovative/conservative in the face of language change?
- To what extent do divergent conceptions of clause and subordination condition our understanding of language change in different clause types?
- What are the causes for the divergent diachronic behavior of different clause types?
- Does the diachronic behavior of different clause types vary depending on the language, language stage, linguistic family or area under discussion?
- Does contact between languages influence the way in which change ensues in different kinds of clauses?
- How do frequency effects affect language change in different clause types?
- How can different statistical analyses help model the diachronic behavior of various kinds of clauses?

Abstracts of up to 500 words should be submitted via Easychair using the following link: https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=sle2022.
Practical information on how to submit abstracts: https://societaslinguistica.eu/sle2022/abstractsubmission/.
Guidelines about what long abstracts should contain: https://societaslinguistica.eu/sle2022/third-call-for-papers/.
Link for joining the SLE: https://societaslinguistica.eu/membership/.

Please note that submitters must be SLE members. Moreover, one person may be the first author of only one submission of any kind (workshop paper, general session paper, poster, or workshop proposal). It is possible to co-author more than two papers; for

details, see the conference's Call for Papers (https://societaslinguistica.eu/sle2022/third-call-for-papers/) and FAQ nr. 14 on http://www.sle2021.eu/faq#question14.

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