

A specter is haunting Europe: The Alps as a linguistic area?

(Workshop proposal for SLE 2018)

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1. Workshop description:

It is a well-known fact that the Alps are a zone of long-standing, intensive contact and multilingualism between Germanic, Romance and Slavic languages and varieties. Exchange between Alpine dialects of different genetic affiliations is well attested in vocabulary and onomastics (Krefeld & Lücke 2014). However, the Alpine context seems to meet exactly the kind of extralinguistic setting where areal convergence in grammatical structure is likely to emerge, too.

Indeed, *unidirectional* grammatical borrowing has been reported: As for Germanic varieties, Mayerthaler & Mayerthaler (1990) have made the (controversial, cf. Rowley 2017) proposal that many syntactic traits of Bavarian are actually pattern-borrowings from (Rhaeto-) Romance. In a similar vein, Ramat (1998) draws attention to different morphosyntactic features resulting from long-lasting contacts around the Alps, and particularly to what Wiemer (2011) in a survey on passive constructions has even termed the ‘Alpine passive’ based on the auxiliary verb COME. As for Romance, cases of verb second (Poletto 2002, Liver 2009) or DO-periphrasis (Benincà & Poletto 2004) have been reported in Alpine varieties, i.e. constructions that are highly reminiscent of similar patterns otherwise much better known from Germanic. As for Slavic, Reindl (2008) attributes a number of morphosyntactic features of (varieties of) Slovenian to the influence of Germanic varieties.

Crucially, the structural effects of long-standing language contact may be more complex than putative unidirectional grammatical borrowing. For example, it is not clear whether the passive based on the auxiliary GO as it is found for instance in Walser German islands in Northern Italy also results from the adoption of a Romance model or rather points to a more complex context of contact-induced grammaticalization (cf Gaeta ms., 2017). Furthermore, *bidirectional* contact-induced change may result in Alpine shared innovations (cf. Seiler 2004 on case marking and clitic doubling): developments that (i) are plausibly explained on the basis of language contact within the Alpine region, (ii) are shared among languages/varieties of different genetic affiliations, and (iii) are much less (or not at all) found in non-Alpine varieties of Germanic, Romance, and Slavic. Shared innovations seem to be the most striking examples for areal structural convergence within the Alpine area.

The goals of the proposed workshop are twofold:

- first, to discuss the question as to whether there exists an Alpine linguistic convergence area, based on convincing empirical case studies of Alpine contact-induced change, in particular shared innovations (in the sense as defined above) in phonological, morphological, and syntactic structure, especially with regard to other closely located convergence zones such as the Charlemagne area or the Balcan area;
- second, to discuss methodological challenges related to fieldwork, language documentation, use of (electronic) resources especially with lesser-used languages, quantification, and the interpretation of change as being contact-induced or not.

2. Call for abstracts:

We invite for contributions discussing empirically well-grounded case studies as well as methodological issues related to the identification of Alpine structural features, i.e. features that are shared among varieties of Germanic, Romance, and Slavic spoken in the Alps, possibly due to structural convergence within the area. Such features may deal with, among others: phonological quantity and prosody; vowel and consonant inventories; case systems; morphology and syntax of pronouns (e.g. clitic doubling, pro-drop and the lack thereof, reinforced pronouns such as *noi altri*, etc.); verb second and deviations thereof; expletive elements, including expletive verbs ('do'); auxiliaries and other functional verbs; subordination (relativization, doubly filled COMP, complementizer agreement, etc.); demonstratives and deictic systems; verb-framing vs. satellite-framing.

Abstracts must not exceed 300 words excluding references. A selection of these (preliminary) abstracts will be included in a workshop proposal for the SLE Annual Conference in Tallinn (29 Aug - 1 Sept 2018). In case the workshop proposal is successful you will be asked to resubmit an extended version of your abstract.

Please send an abstract to

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Deadline: Sunday, 12 November 2017, 23:59 CET.

References:

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Reindl, Donald F. (2008), *Language Contact: German and Slovenian*. Bochum: Brockmeyer.

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Wiemer, Björn (2011), The grammaticalization of passives. In: *The Oxford Handbook of Grammaticalization*, ed. by Heiko Narrog & Bernd Heine. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 535-546.