

Experimental approaches to Romance morphosyntax

Senta Zeugin, Albert Wall, Philipp Obrist, Johannes Kabatek & Patrick Santos Rebelo
(University of Zurich, University of Vienna, University of Zurich, University of Zurich &
University of Zurich)

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In the last decades, addressing linguistic issues by experiments has become an established practice in linguistic research. Nonetheless, experiments are significantly more common in certain areas of linguistics and in the study of certain languages. In this workshop, we propose to focus on linguistic fields and languages that only more recently have seen a surge in experimental studies, namely morpho-syntactic features in Romance.

While researchers have been prolific in applying and adapting experimental approaches to some languages, others lag behind. Germanic languages, English and German in particular, feature a wide range of different experimental studies, whereas significantly less work has been done on Romance. This state of affairs can easily be verified by consulting the programmes of relevant international conferences like the annual CUNY Conferences on sentence processing, the biannual Tübingen conference series on Linguistic Evidence, or the Words in the World Project/2020 conference. Promising lines of publication, such as the contributions to Gess & Rubin (2004), are notable, yet unsustainable exceptions from the Romance perspective. However, especially in more recent years, Romance languages are making up ground, and several topics have been addressed from an experimental point of view, e.g. different aspects of pronoun resolution (Demestre et al. 1999, de la Fuente & Hemforth 2013), Differential Object Marking (Nieuwland et al. 2013, Wall 2015 and Wall et al. 2020a on Spanish; Zeugin on Catalan; Montrul 2019 on Spanish and Romanian), or Bare Nouns (Wall 2014, Beviláqua et al. 2016).

The aim of this workshop is to give visibility to these recent developments and to bring together the corresponding lines of research, deriving the greatest possible benefit of such a platform for researchers working on similar topics. Concentrating on Romance languages ensures a high degree of cross-linguistic comparability and transfer of insights, while at the same time offering a wide range of cross-linguistic variation of morpho-syntactic features to explore.

This workshop focuses on morphosyntax, an area where experimental methods have gained some ground in recent years, but are still far from being commonplace, compared to psycholinguistics or phonetics. In phonetics experimental approaches have a long-standing tradition (de Groot 1928, Fry 1954, Cohen 1962, to name some of the earlier works); however, psycholinguistics is commonly seen as the starting point of general experimental linguistics in the 1970s (Levelt 1970, Fodor et al. 1974). Although the main focus of psycholinguistics lies on processing and general cognitive mechanisms, the research questions

revolve around the same linguistic phenomena we find in general linguistics (Hemforth 2013, Derwing & de Almeida 2009). The considerable amount of overlap allows using psycholinguistic methods in other areas of experimental linguistics (cf. Schütze 2011 or Featherston & Sternefeld 2007 for syntax, Noveck & Sperber 2004 for pragmatics).

Considering the wide range of experimental methods available (Derwing & de Almeida 2009), the most prevalent method in the domain of morphosyntax seems to be acceptability rating with different types of Likert scales (Preston & Colman 2000), magnitude estimations (Bard et al. 1996, Featherston 2005), or other types of rating systems. Other frequently used experimental methods are different types of elicitation or production tasks, e.g. sentence completion, sentence production etc. (Eisenbeiss 2011, Wall et al. 2020b). Further methods include self-paced reading, EEGs or eye tracking. Often, studies apply several experimental methods (Bader & Häussler 2010) in order to approach a phenomenon from different angles and to gain more robust evidence (Schütze 2011). Combining experiments with other research methods like corpus studies or traditional interview techniques has also proven promising (e.g. Bresnan 2007, Gries 2003). We would like to discuss the potential and challenges of the different methods and combinations of methods based on specific morpho-syntactic features presented by the workshop participants.

As mentioned, Romance morphosyntax is a field with a huge potential for experimental approaches. Besides the lines of research already described, other examples of morpho-syntactic features analysed in recent studies are clitic doubling (von Heusinger & Tigau 2019 on Romanian), subject omission (Soares et al. 2020 on Portuguese), *leísmo* (Rodríguez-Ordóñez on Spanish and Basque), as well as morphological processing (Crepaldi et al. 2014 for Italian) and issues at the syntax-information structure interface (Abeillé & Winckel 2019). This is but a small selection of morpho-syntactic features that can be studied via experimental methods and is by no means intended as a limitation for possible workshop papers. We also strongly encourage papers analysing several languages or dialects via parallel or comparable experiments (e.g. Ionin et al. 2011, Wall et al. 2020a & 2020b), thus providing a more robust basis for cross-linguistic comparison.

The central aim of the workshop is to stimulate the use of experimental methods on morpho-syntactic features, especially in Romance languages, and to work towards establishing common practices and standards. We invite papers addressing one or several of the following questions:

- How can experimental methods inform linguistic theory?
- What are the advantages and best practices in the application of null hypothesis testing vs. exploratory data analysis?
- Are some methods more/less suited to the study of specific Romance morpho-syntactic features?
- What are the advantages of a combination of different experimental methods or of experimental and non-experimental methods?
- What is the potential of comparative/parallel studies applying experimental methods to several languages?

Possible topics include:

- Papers addressing one or several specific morpho-syntactic features
- Papers with a focus on one or several Romance languages (or Romance languages in contact with other languages)
- Papers combining different experimental methods or experimental and non-experimental methods in studying Romance morpho-syntactic features
- Experimental approaches with a comparative/variational focus
- Discussions of specific methodological aspects of experiments, e.g. experimental setup, Likert scales vs. magnitude estimation, different statistical analysis of experimental data etc.

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